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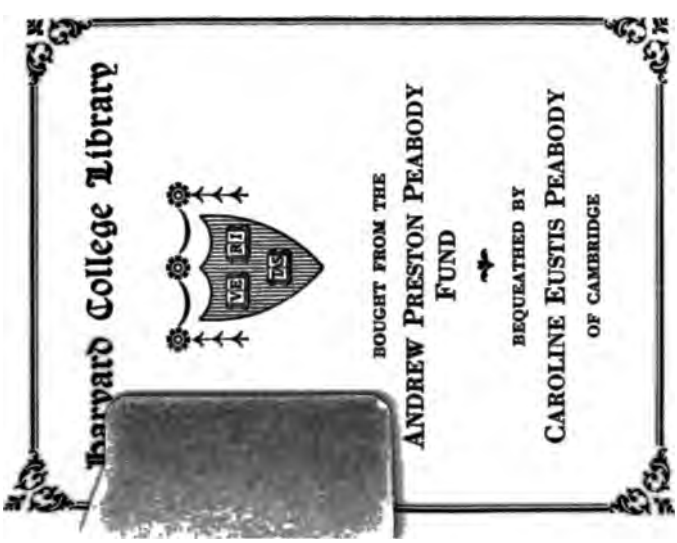


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Hereward the Wake

"Last of the English"

BY

CHARLES KINGSLEY

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

MAURICE KINGSLEY



IN TWO VOLUMES

Volume II.

NEW YORK

J. F. TAYLOR AND COMPANY



Finnegans Wake

IN TWO VOLUMES

Volume II

NEW YORK

[illegible] TAYLOR AND COMPANY



Then Hereward went in, and knelt before the Norman.

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IN TWO VOLUMES

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CONTENTS

VOLUME II

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXI.	How Ivo Taillebois marched out of Spalding Town	1
XXII.	How Hereward sailed for England once and for all	12
XXIII.	How Hereward gathered an Army	21
XXIV.	How Archbishop Aldred died of Sorrow	45
XXV.	How Hereward found a Wiser Man in England than himself	51
XXVI.	How Hereward fulfilled his Words to the Prior of the Golden Borough	65
XXVII.	How they held a Great Meeting in the Hall of Ely	95
XXVIII.	How they fought at Aldreth	102
XXIX.	How Sir Deda brought News from Ely	111
XXX.	How Hereward played the Potter; and how he cheated the King	121
XXXI.	How they fought again at Aldreth	145
XXXII.	How King William took Counsel of a Churchman	155
XXXIII.	How the Monks of Ely did after their Kind	176
XXXIV.	How Hereward went to the Greenwood	193
XXXV.	How Abbot Thorold was put to Ransom	206
XXXVI.	How Alftruda wrote to Hereward	222
XXXVII.	How Hereward lost Sword Brainbiter	252

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXXVIII.	How Hereward came in to the King . .	258
XXXIX.	How Torfrida confessed that she had been inspired by the Devil	267
XL.	How Earl Waltheof was made a Saint	287
XLI.	How Hereward began to get his Soul's Price	294
XLII.	How Deeping Fen was drained	318

List of Illustrations

VOLUME II

Then Hereward went in, and knelt before the Norman . . . . . *Frontispiece*

Took her little one by the hand, and went among the men . . . . . *To face page* 22

Hereward . . . forgot Torfrida for the second time . . . . . „ „ 80

Torfrida rode at their head, . . . her fetters clanking on her limbs . . . . . „ „ 148

With a shout of "A Wake! A Wake!" . . . „ „ 210

Down the Roman road toward the fen . . . . „ „ 312



HEREWARD THE WAKE

HEREWARD THE WAKE

"LAST OF THE ENGLISH"

CHAPTER XXI

HOW IVO TAILLEBOIS MARCHED OUT OF SPALDING TOWN

A PROUD man was Ivo Taillebois, as he rode next morning out of Spalding town, with hawk on fist, hound at heel, and a dozen men-at-arms at his back, who would, on due or undue cause shown, hunt men while he hunted game.

An adventurer from Anjou, brutal, ignorant, and profligate — low-born, too (for his own men whispered, behind his back, that he was no more than his name hinted, a wood-cutter's son), he still had his deserts. Valiant he was, cunning, and skilled in war. He and his troop of Angevine ruttiers had fought like tigers by William's side at Hastings; and he had been rewarded with many a manor, which had been Earl Algar's, and should now have been Earl Edwin's, or Morcar's, or, it may be, Hereward's own.

"A fat land and fair," said he to himself; "and, after I have hanged a few more of these barbarians, a peaceable fief enough to hand down to the lawful heirs of my body, if I had one. I must marry.

Blessed Virgin! this it is to serve and honor your gracious glory, as I have always done according to my poor humility. Who would have thought that Ivo Taillebois would ever rise so high in life, as to be looking out for a wife — and that a lady, too?"

Then thought he over the peerless beauties of the Lady Lucia, Edwin and Morcar's sister, almost as fair as that hapless aunt of hers, Aldytha, King Harold's widow. Eddeva faira, Eddeva pulcra, stands her name in Domesday Book; known, even to her Norman conquerors, as the beauty of her time, as Godiva her mother had been before her. Scarcely less beautiful was Lucia, as Ivo had seen her at William's court, half captive and half guest; and he longed for her; love her he could not. "I have her father's lands," quoth he; "what more reasonable than to have the daughter, too? And have her I will, unless the Mamzer, in his present merciful and political mood, makes a countess of her, and marries her up to some Norman coxcomb, with a long pedigree — invented the year before last. If he does throw away his daughter on that Earl Edwin, in his fancy for petting and patting these savages into good humor, he is not likely to throw away Edwin's sister on a Taillebois. Well. I must put a spoke in Edwin's wheel. It will not be difficult to make him or Morcar, or both of them, traitors once more and forever. We must have a rebellion in these parts. I will talk about it to Gilbert of Ghent. We must make these savages desperate, and William furious, or he will be soon giving them back their lands, besides asking them to Court; and then how are valiant knights like us, who have won England for

him, to be paid for their trouble? No, no. We must have a fresh rebellion, and a fresh confiscation, and then when English lasses are going cheap, perhaps the Lady Lucia may fall to my share."

And Ivo Taillebois kept his word; and without difficulty, for he had many to help him. To drive the English to desperation, and to get a pretext for seizing their lands, was the game which the Normans played, and but too well.

As he rode out of Spalding town, a man was being hanged on the gallows there permanently provided.

That was so common a sight, that Ivo would not have stopped, had not a priest, who was comforting the criminal, run forward, and almost thrown himself under the horse's feet.

"Mercy, good my lord, in the name of God and all His saints."

Ivo went to ride on.

"Mercy!" and he laid hands on Ivo's bridle. "If he took a few pike out of your mere, remember that the mere was his, and his father's before him; and do not send a sorely tempted soul out of the world for a paltry fish."

"And where am I to get fish for Lent, sir priest, if every rascal nets my waters, because his father did so before him? Take your hand off my bridle, or, par le splendeur Dex" (Ivo thought it fine to use King William's favorite oath), "I will hew it off."

The priest looked at him, with something of honest fierceness in his eyes; and dropping the bridle, muttered to himself in Latin: "The bloodthirsty and deceitful man shall not live out half

his days. Nevertheless my trust shall be in Thee, O Lord."

"What art muttering, beast? Go home to thy wife" (wife was by no means the word which Ivo used), "and make the most of her, before I rout out thee and thy fellow canons, and put in good monks from Normandy in the place of your drunken English swine. Hang him!" shouted he, as the bystanders fell on their knees before the tyrant, crouching in terror, every woman for her husband, every man for wife and daughter. "And hearken, you fen-frogs all. Whoso touches pike or eel, swimming or wading fowl, within these meres of mine without my leave, I will hang him as I hanged this man; as I hanged four brothers in a row on Wrokesham bridge but last week."

"Go to Wrokesham bridge, and see," shouted a shrill cracked voice from behind the crowd.

All looked round; and more than one of Ivo's men set up a yell, the hangman loudest of all.

"That's he, the heron again! Catch him! Stop him! Shoot him!"

But that was not so easy. As Ivo pushed his horse through the crowd, careless of whom he crushed, he saw a long lean figure flying through the air seven feet aloft, his heels higher than his head, on the farther side of a deep broad ditch; and on the nearer side of the same, one of his best men lying stark, with a cloven skull.

"Go to Wrokesham!" shrieked the lean man, as he rose, and showed a ridiculously long nose, neck, and legs (a type still not uncommon in the fens), a quilted leather coat, a double-bladed axe slung over his shoulder by a thong, a round shield at his back, and a pole three times as long as himself,

which he dragged after him, like an unwieldy tail.

"The heron, the heron!" shouted the English.

"Follow him, men, heron or hawk!" shouted Ivo, galloping his horse up to the ditch, and stopping short at fifteen feet of water.

"Shoot, some one! Where are the bows gone?"

The heron was away two hundred yards, running, in spite of his pole, at a wonderful pace, before a bow could be brought to bear. He seemed to expect an arrow, for he stopped, glanced his eye round, threw himself flat on his face, with his shield, not over his body, but over his bare legs; sprang up as the shaft stuck in the ground beside him; ran on; planted his pole in the next dyke, and flew over it.

In a few minutes he was beyond pursuit, and Ivo turned, breathless with rage, to ask who he was.

"Alas, sir, he is the man who set free the four men at Wrokesham bridge last week."

"Set free! Are they not hanged and dead?"

"We — we dare not tell you. But he came upon us ——"

"Single-handed, you cowards?"

"Sir, he is not a man, but a witch or a devil. He asked us what we did there. One of our men laughed at his long neck and legs, and called him Heron. 'Heron I am,' says he, 'and strike like a heron, right at the eyes;' and with that he cuts the man over the face with his axe, and laid him dead, and then another and another."

"Till you all ran away, villains."

"We gave back a step — no more. And he freed one of those four, and he again the rest; and

then they all set on us, and went to hang us in their own stead."

"When there were ten of you, I thought."

"Sir, as we told you, he is no mortal man, but a fiend."

"Beasts, fools! Well, I have hanged this one, at least!" growled Ivo, and then rode sullenly on.

"Who is this fellow?" cried he to the trembling English.

"Wulfric Raher, Wulfric the Heron, of Wrokesham, in Norfolk."

"Aha! And I hold a manor of his," said Ivo to himself. "Look you, villains, this fellow is in league with you."

A burst of abject denial followed. "Since the French — since Sir Frederick, as they call him, drove him out of his Wrokesham lands, he wanders the country, as you see; to-day here: but heaven only knows where he will be to-morrow."

"And finds, of course, a friend everywhere. Now march!" and a string of threats and curses followed.

It was hard to see why Wulfric should not have found friends; as he was simply a small holder, or squire, driven out of house and land, and turned adrift on the wide world, for the offence of having fought in Harold's army at the battle of Hastings. But to give him food or shelter was, in Norman eyes, an act of rebellion against the rightful King William; and Ivo rode on, boiling over with righteous indignation, along the narrow drove which led toward Deeping.

A pretty lass came along the drove, driving a few sheep before her, and spinning as she walked.

"Whose lass are you?" shouted Ivo.

"The abbot's of Crowland, please your lordship," said she, trembling.

"Much too pretty to belong to monks. Chuck her up behind you, one of you."

The shrieking and struggling girl was mounted behind a horseman, and bound; and Ivo rode on.

A woman ran out of a turf-hut on the drove-side, attracted by the girl's cries. It was her mother.

"My lass! Give me my lass, for the love of St. Mary and all saints!" And she clung to Ivo's bridle.

He struck her down, and rode on over her.

A man cutting sedges in a punt in the lode alongside, looked up at the girl's shrieks, and leaped on shore, scythe in hand.

"Father! father!" cried she.

"I'll rid thee, lass, or die for it," said he, as he sprang up the drove-dyke, and swept right and left at the horses' legs.

The men recoiled. One horse went down, lamed for life; another staggered backwards into the farther lode, and was drowned. But an arrow went through the brave serf's heart, and Ivo rode on, cursing more bitterly than ever, and comforted himself by flying his hawks at a covey of partridges.

Soon a group came along the drove which promised fresh sport to the man-hunters; but as the foremost person came up, Ivo stopped in wonder at the shout of—

"Ivo! Ivo Taillebois! Halt and have a care! The English are risen, and we are all dead men!"

The words were spoken in French; and in French Ivo answered, laughing:

"Thou art not a dead man yet, it seems, Sir Robert; art going on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, that thou comest in this fashion? Or dost thou mean to return to Anjou as bare as thou camest out of it?"

For Sir Robert had, like Edgar in Shakespeare's Lear, "reserved himself a blanket, else had they all been shamed."

But very little more did either he, his lady, and his three children wear, as they trudged along the drove, in even poorer case than that

> Robert of Coningsby
> Who came out of Normandy,
> With his wife Tiffany,
> And his maid Maupas,
> And his dog Hardigras.

"For the love of heaven and all chivalry, joke me no jokes, Sir Ivo: but give me and mine clothes and food. The barbarians rose on us last night — with Azer, the ruffian who owned my lands, at their head; and drove us out into the night as we are, bidding us carry the news to you, for your turn would come next. There are forty or more of them in West Deeping now, and coming eastward, they say, to visit you, and what is more than all, Hereward is come again."

"Hereward?" cried Ivo, who knew that name full well.

Whereon Sir Robert told him the terrible tragedy of Bourne.

"Mount the lady on a horse, and wrap her in my cloak. Get that dead villain's clothes for Sir Robert as we go back. Put your horses' heads about and ride for Spalding."

"What shall we do with the lass?"

"We cannot be burdened with the jade. She has cost us two good horses already. Leave her in the road, bound as she is, and let us see if St. Guthlac her master will come and untie her."

So they rode back. Coming from Deeping two hours after, Azer and his men found the girl on the road, dead.

"Another count in the long score," quoth Azer. But when, in two hours more, they came to Spalding town, they found all the folk upon the street, shouting and praising the host of heaven. There was not a Frenchman left in the town.

For when Ivo returned home, ere yet Sir Robert and his family were well clothed and fed, there galloped into Spalding from the north, Sir Ascelin, whilom of St. Valery, nephew and man of Thorold, would-be abbot of Peterborough.

"Not bad news, I hope?" cried Ivo, as Ascelin clanked into the hall. "We have enough of our own. Here is all Kesteven, as the barbarians call it, risen, and they are murdering us right and left."

"Worse news than that, Ivo Taillebois"—"sir," or "sieur," Ascelin was loath to call him, being himself a man of family and fashion; and holding the nouveaux venus in deep contempt. "Worse news than that. The North has risen again, and proclaimed Prince Edgar King."

"A king of words! What care I, or you, as long as the Mamzer, God bless him, is a king of deeds?"

"They have done their deeds, though, too. Gospatric and Merlesweyn are back out of Scotland. They attacked Robert de Comines[1] at Durham,

[1] Ancestor of the Comyns of Scotland.

and burned him in his own house. There was but one of his men got out of Durham to tell the news. And now they have marched on York; and all the chiefs, they say, have joined them — Archill the thane, and Edwin and Morcar, and Waltheof too, the young traitors."

"Blessed Virgin!" cried Ivo, "thou art indeed gracious to thy most unworthy knight!"

"What do you mean?"

"You will see some day. Now, I will tell you but one word. When fools make hay, wise men build ricks. This rebellion — if it had not come of itself, I would have roused it. We wanted it, to cure William of this just and benevolent policy of his, which would have ended in sending us back to France as poor as we left it. Now, what am I expected to do? What says Gilbert of Ghent, the wise man of Lic—nic— what the pest do you call that outlandish place, which no civilized lips can pronounce?"

"Lic-nic-cole?" replied Ascelin, who, like the rest of the French, never could manage to say Lincoln. "He says, 'March to me, and with me to join the king at York.'"

"Then he says well. These fat acres will be none the leaner, if I leave the English slaves to crop them for six months. Men! arm and horse Sir Robert of Deeping. Then arm and horse yourselves. We march north in half an hour, bag and baggage, scrip and scrippage. You are all bachelors, like me, and travel light. So off with you! Sir Ascelin, you will eat and drink?"

"That will I."

"Quick, then, butler; and after that pack up the Englishman's plate-chest, which we inherited

by right of fist — the only plate, and the only title-deeds I ever possessed.

"Now, Sir Ascelin," — as the three knights, the lady, and the poor children ate their fastest, — "listen to me. The art of war lies in this one nutshell — to put the greatest number of men into one place at one time, and let all other places shift; so striking swiftly, and striking heavily. That is the rule of our liege lord King William; and by it he will conquer England, or the world, if he will; and while he does that, he shall never say that Ivo Taillebois stayed at home to guard his own manors, while he could join his king, and win all the manors of England once and for all."

"Pardex! whatever men may say of thy lineage or thy virtues, they cannot deny this, — that thou art a most wise and valiant captain."

"That am I," quoth Taillebois, too much pleased with the praise to care about being tutoyé by a younger man. "As for my lineage, my lord the king has a fellow-feeling for upstarts; and the woodman's grandson may very well serve the tanner's. Now, men! is the litter ready for the lady and children? I am sorry to rattle you about thus, madame: but war has no courtesies; and march I must."

And so the French went out of Spalding town.

"Don't be in a hurry to thank your saints!" shouted Ivo to his victims. "I shall be back this day three months; and then you shall see a row of gibbets all the way from here to Deeping, and an Englishman hanging on every one."

CHAPTER XXII

HOW HEREWARD SAILED FOR ENGLAND ONCE AND FOR ALL

SO Hereward fought the Viscount of Pinkney, who had the usual luck which befell those who crossed swords with him; and plotted meanwhile with Gyda and the Countess Judith. Abbot Egelsin sent them news from King Sweyn in Denmark; soon Judith and Tosti's two sons went themselves to Sweyn, and helped the plot and the fitting out of the armament. News they had from England in plenty, by messengers from Queen Matilda to the sister who was intriguing to dethrone her husband, and by private messengers from Durham and from York.

Baldwin, the débonnaire marquis, had not lived to see this fruit of his long efforts to please everybody. He had gone to his rest the year before; and now there ruled in Bruges his son, Baldwin the Good, "Count Palatine," as he styled himself, and his wife Richilda, the Lady of Hainault.

They probably cared as little for the success of their sister Matilda, as they did for that of their sister Judith; and followed out — Baldwin at least — the great marquis's plan of making Flanders a retreat for the fugitives of all the countries round.

At least, if (as seems) Sweyn's fleet made the coast of Flanders its rendezvous and base of oper-

ations against King William, Baldwin offered no resistance.

So the messengers came, and the plots went on. Great was the delight of Hereward and the ladies when they heard of the taking of Durham and York; but bitter their surprise and rage when they heard that Gospatric and the confederates had proclaimed Edgar Atheling king.

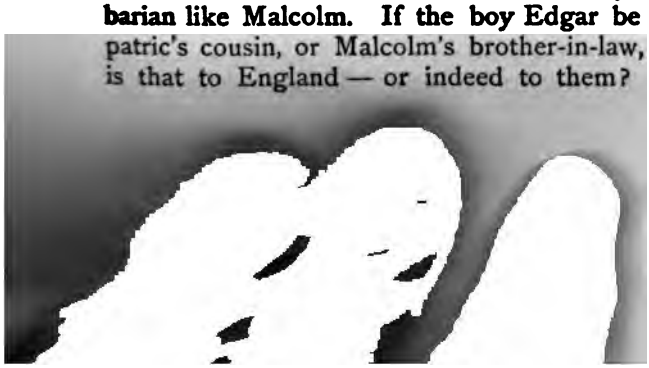
"Fools! they will ruin all!" cried Gyda. "Do they expect Sweyn Ulfsson, who never moved a finger yet, unless he saw that it would pay him within the hour, to spend blood and treasure in putting that puppet boy upon the throne instead of himself?"

"Calm yourself, great countess," said Hereward, with a smile. "The man who puts him on the throne will find it very easy to take him off again when he needs."

"Pish!" said Gyda. "He must put him on the throne first. And how will he do that? Will the men of the Danelagh, much less the Northumbrians south of Tyne, ever rally round an Atheling of Cerdic's house?"

"Those between Tyne and Forth will join him," said Hereward. "They are Saxons like himself."

"And who are they, that three-fourths of England should be scorned for their sake? If their cousins of Wessex, with my boys at their head, could not face this Frenchman, how will they? It is in my blood and my kin, in the Danelagh and the Danes, that the strength of England lies: and not in a handful of Scotch earls, backed by a barbarian like Malcolm. If the boy Edgar be Gospatric's cousin, or Malcolm's brother-in-law, what is that to England — or indeed to them? The



boy is a mere stalking-horse, behind which each of these greedy chiefs expects to get back his own lands in the North; and if they can get them back by any other means, well and good. Mark my words, Sir Hereward, that cunning Frenchman will treat with them one by one, and betray them one by one, till there is none left."

How far Gyda was right will be seen hereafter. But a less practised diplomat than the great countess might have speculated reasonably on such an event. The connection between the Scotch and English royalty was, at the moment, most harmful to England. But more harmful far would it have been, had the Danish invasion succeeded; had England been parted, perhaps forever, from the ruling houses of Scotland, and become a mere appanage of the Scandinavian kings.

Then came darker news. As Ivo had foreseen, and as Ivo had done his best to bring about, William dashed on York, and drove out the confederates with terrible slaughter; profaned the churches, plundered the town. Gospatric and the earls retreated to Durham; the Atheling, more cautious, to Scotland.

Then came a strange story, worthy of the grown children, who, in those old times, bore the hearts of boys with the ferocity and intellect of men.

A great fog fell on the Frenchmen as they struggled over the Durham moors. The doomed city was close beneath them; they heard Wear roaring in his wooded gorge. But a darkness, as of Egypt, lay upon them: "neither rose any from his place."

Then the Frenchman cried: "This darkness is from St. Cuthbert himself. We have invaded his

holy soil. Who has not heard how none who offend St. Cuthbert ever went unpunished? how palsy, blindness, madness, fall on those who dare to violate his sanctuary?"

And the French turned and fled from before the face of St. Cuthbert; and William went down to Winchester angry and sad, and then went off to Gloucestershire; and hunted — for whatever befell, he still would hunt — in the forest of Dean.

And still Sweyn and his Danes had not sailed; and Hereward walked to and fro in his house, impatiently, and bided his time.

In July Baldwin died. Arnoul, the boy, was Count of Flanders, and Richilda, his sorceress-mother, ruled the land in his name. She began to oppress the Flemings; not those of French Flanders, round St. Omer, but those of Flemish Flanders, toward the north. They threatened to send for Robert the Frison to right them.

Hereward was perplexed. He was Robert the Frison's friend, and old soldier. Richilda was Torfrida's friend; so was, still more, the boy Arnoul; which party should he take? Neither if he could help it. And he longed to be safe out of the land.

And at last his time came. Martin Lightfoot ran in, breathless, to tell how the sails of a mighty fleet were visible from the Dunes.

"Here?" cried Hereward. "What are the fools doing down here, wandering into the very jaws of the wolf? How will they land here? They were to have gone straight to the Lincolnshire coast. God grant this mistake be not the first of dozens!"

Hereward went into Torfrida's bower.

"This is an evil business. The Danes are here, where they have no business, instead of being off Scheldtmouth, as I entreated them. But go we must, or be forever shamed. Now, true wife, are you ready? Dare you leave home, and kin, and friends, once and for all, to go, you know not whither, with one who may be a gory corpse by this day week?"

"I dare," said she.

So they went down the Aa by night, with Torfrida's mother, and the child, and all their jewels, and all they had in the world. And their housecarles went with them, forty men, tried and trained, who had vowed to follow Hereward round the world. And there were two long ships ready, and twenty good mariners in each. So when the Danes made the South Foreland the next morning, they were aware of two gallant ships bearing down on them, with a strange knot embroidered on their sails.

A proud man was Hereward that day, as he sailed into the midst of the Danish fleet, and up to the royal ships, and shouted,—

"I am Hereward the Wake; and I come to take service under my rightful lord, Sweyn king of England."

"Come on board, then; well do we know you, and right glad we are to have the Wake with us."

And Hereward laid his ship's bow upon the quarter of the royal ship (to lay alongside was impossible, for fear of breaking oars), and came on board.

"And thou art Hereward?" asked a tall and noble warrior.

"I am. And thou art Sweyn Ulfsson, the king?"

"I am Jarl Asbiorn his brother."

"Then, where is the king?"

"He is in Denmark, and I command his fleet; and with me Canute and Harald, Sweyn's sons, and jarls and bishops enough for all England."

This was spoken in a somewhat haughty tone, in answer to the look of surprise and disappointment which Hereward had, unawares, allowed to pass over his face.

"Thou art better than none," said Hereward. "Now, hearken, Asbiorn the jarl. Had Sweyn been here, I would have put my hand between his, and said in my own name, and that of all the men in Kesteven and the fens, Sweyn's men we are, to live and die! But now, as it is, I say, for me and them, thy men we are, to live and die, as long as thou art true to us."

"True to you I will be," said Asbiorn.

"Be it so," said Hereward. "True we shall be, whatever betide. Now, whither goes Jarl Asbiorn, and all his great meinie?"

"We purpose to try Dover."

"You will not take it. The Frenchman has strengthened it with one of his accursed keeps, and without battering engines you may sit before it a month."

"What if I ask you to go in thither yourself, and try the mettle and the luck which, they say, never failed Hereward yet?"

"I should say that it was a child's trick to throw away against a paltry stone wall the life of a man who was ready to raise for you in Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire five times as many men as you will lose in taking Dover."

"Hereward is right," said more than one jarl. "We shall need him in his own country."

"If you are wise, to that country you yourselves will go. It is ready to receive you. This is ready to oppose you. You are attacking the Frenchman at his strongest point, instead of his weakest. Did I not send again and again, entreating you to cross from Scheldtmouth to the Wash, and send me word that I might come and raise the Fen-men for you, and then we would all go north together?"

"I have heard, ere now," said Asbiorn, haughtily, "that Hereward, though he be a valiant Viking, is more fond of giving advice than of taking it."

Hereward was about to answer very fiercely. If he had, no one would have thought any harm, in those plain-spoken times. But he was wise; and restrained himself, remembering that Torfrida was there, all but alone, in the midst of a fleet of savage men; and that beside, he had a great deed to do, and must do it as he could. So he answered, —

"Asbiorn the jarl has not, it seems, heard this of Hereward: that because he is accustomed to command, he is also accustomed to obey. What thou wilt do, do, and bid me do. He that quarrels with his captain, cuts his own throat and his fellows' too."

"Wisely spoken!" said the jarls; and Hereward went back to his ship.

"Torfrida," said he bitterly, "the game is lost before it is begun."

"God forbid, my beloved! What words are these?"

"Sweyn — fool that he is with his over-caution — always the same — has let the prize slip from between his fingers. He has sent Asbiorn instead of himself."

"But why is that so terrible a mistake?"

"We do not want a fleet of Vikings in England,

to plunder the French and English alike. We want a king, a king, a king!" and Hereward stamped with rage. "And instead of a king, we have this Asbiorn — all men know him — greedy, and false, and weak-headed. Here he is going to be beaten off at Dover; and then, I suppose, at the next port; and so forth, till the whole season is wasted, and the ships and men lost by driblets. Pray for us to God and His saints, Torfrida, you who are nearer to heaven than I; for we never needed it more."

So Asbiorn went in; tried to take Dover; and was beaten off with heavy loss.

Then the jarls bade him take Hereward's advice. But he would not.

So he went round the Foreland, and tried Sandwich — as if, landing there, he would have been safe in marching on London, in the teeth of the élite of Normandy.

But he was beaten off there, with more loss. Then, too late, he took Hereward's advice — or, rather, half of it — and sailed north; but only to commit more follies.

He dared not enter the Thames. He would not go on to the Wash; but he went into the Orwell, and attacked Ipswich, plundering right and left, instead of proclaiming King Sweyn, and calling the Danish folk around him. They naturally enough rose; and, like valiant men, beat him off; while Hereward lay outside the river mouth, his soul within him black with disappointment, rage, and shame. He would not go in. He would not fight against his own countrymen. He would not help to turn the whole plan into a marauding raid. And he told Jarl Asbiorn so, so fiercely, that his life would have been in danger, had not the force

of his arm been as much feared as the force of his name was needed.

At last they came to Yarmouth. Asbiorn would needs land there, and try Norwich.

Hereward was nigh desperate; but he hit upon a plan. Let Asbiorn do so, if he would. He himself would sail round to the Wash, raise the Fen-men, and march eastward at their head through Norfolk to meet him. Asbiorn himself could not refuse so rational a proposal. All the jarls and bishops approved loudly; and away Hereward went to the Wash, his heart well-nigh broke, foreseeing nothing but evil.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW HEREWARD GATHERED AN ARMY

THE voyage round the Norfolk coast was rough and wild. Torfrida was ill; the little girl was ill; the poor old mother was so ill that she could not even say her prayers. Packed uncomfortably under the awning on the poop, Torfrida looked on from beneath it upon the rolling water-waste, with a heart full of gloomy forebodings, and a brain whirling with wild fancies. The wreaths of cloud were gray witches, hurrying on with the ship to work her woe; the low red storm-dawn was streaked with blood; the water which gurgled all night under the lee was alive with hoarse voices; and again and again she started from fitful slumber to clasp the child closer to her, or look up for comfort to the sturdy figure of her husband, as he stood, like a tower of strength, steering and commanding, the long night through.

Yes; on him she could depend. On his courage, on his skill. And as for his love, had she not that utterly? and what more did woman need?

But she was going she scarce knew whither; and she scarce knew for what. At least, on a fearful adventure, which might have a fearful end. She looked at the fair child, and reproached herself for a moment; at the poor old mother, whining and mumbling, her soft southern heart

quite broken by the wild chill northern sea-breeze; and reproached herself still more. But was it not her duty? Him she loved, and his she was; and him she must follow, over sea and land, till death; and if possible, beyond death again forever. For his sake she would slave. For his sake she would be strong. If ever there rose in her a home-sickness, a regret for leaving Flanders, and much more for that sunnier South where she was born, he at least should never be saddened or weakened by one hint of her sadness and weakness. And so it befell that, by the time they made the coast, she had (as the old chronicler says) "altogether conquered all womanly softness."

And yet she shuddered at the dreary mud-creek into which they ran their ships, at the dreary flats on which they landed shivering, swept over by the keen northeast wind. A lonely land; and within, she knew not what of danger, it might be of hideous death.

But she would be strong: and when they were all landed, men, arms, baggage, and had pitched the tents which the wise Hereward had brought with them, she rose up like a queen, and took her little one by the hand, and went among the men, and spoke, —

"Housecarles and mariners! You are following a great captain, upon a great adventure. How great he is you know as well as I. I have given him myself, my wealth, and all I have; and have followed him I know not whither, because I trust him utterly. Men, trust him as I trust him, and follow him to the death."

"That we will!"

"And, men, I am here among you, a weak



Took her little one by the hand, and went among the men.





woman, trying to be brave for his sake — and for yours. Be true to me, too, as I have been true to you. For your sake have I worked hard, day and night, for many a year. For you I have baked and brewed and cooked, like any poor churl's wife. Is there a garment on your backs which my hands have not mended? Is there a wound on your limbs which my hands have not salved? Oh, if Torfrida has been true to you, promise me this day that you will be true men to her and hers; that if — which Heaven forbid — aught should befall him and me, you will protect this my poor old mother, and this my child, who has grown up amongst you all — a lamb brought up within the lion's den. Look at her, men, and promise me, on the faith of valiant soldiers, that you will be lions on her behalf, if she shall ever need you. Promise me, that if you have but one more stroke left to strike on earth, you will strike it to defend the daughter of Hereward and Torfrida from cruelty and shame."

The men answered with a shout which rolled along the fen, and startled the wild fowl up from far-off pools. They crowded round their lady; they kissed her hands; they bent down and kissed their little playmate; and swore — one by God and His apostles, and the next by Odin and Thor — that she should be a daughter to each and every one of them, as long as they could grip steel in hand.

Then (says the chronicler) Hereward sent on spies, to see whether the Frenchmen were in the land, and how folks fared at Holbeach, Spalding, and Bourne.

The two young Siwards, as knowing the country

and the folk, pushed forward, and with them Martin Lightfoot, to bring back news.

Martin ran back all the way from Holbeach, the very first day, with right good tidings. There was not a Frenchman in the town. Neither was there, they said, in Spalding. Ivo Taillebois was still away at the wars, and long might he stay.

So forward they marched, and everywhere the landsfolk were tilling the ground in peace; and when they saw that stout array, they hurried out to meet the troops, and burdened them with food and ale, and all they needed.

And at Holbeach, and at Spalding, Hereward split up the war-arrow, and sent it through Kesteven, and south into the Cambridge fens, calling on all men to arm, and come to him at Bourne, in the name of Waltheof and Morcar the earls.

And at every farm and town he blew the war-horn, and summoned every man who could bear arms to be ready, against the coming of the Danish host from Norwich. And so through all the fens came true what the wild fowl said upon the meres, that the Wake was come again.

And when he came to Bourne, all men were tilling in peace. The terror of the Wake had fallen on the Frenchmen; and no man had dared to enter on his inheritance, or to set a French foot over the threshold of that ghastly hall, above the gable whereof still grinned the fifteen heads, on the floor whereof still spread the dark stains of blood.

Only Gery dwelt in a corner of the house, and with him Leofric, once a roystering housecarle of Hereward's youth; now a monk of Crowland, and a deacon, whom Lady Godiva had sent thither that he might take care of her poor. And there Gery

and Leofric had kept house, and told sagas to each other over the beech-log fire night after night; for all Leofric's study was, says the chronicler, "to gather together, for the edification of his hearers, all the acts of giants and warriors out of the fables of the ancients, or from faithful report; and to commit them to writing, that he might keep England in mind thereof." Which Leofric was afterwards ordained priest, probably in Ely, by Bishop Egelwin of Durham; and was Hereward's chaplain for many a year.

Then Hereward, as he had promised, set fire to the three farms close to the Bruneswold; and all his outlawed friends, lurking in the Forest, knew by that signal that Hereward was come again. So they cleansed out the old house, though they did not take down the heads from off the gable; and Torfrida went about the town, and about it, and confessed that England was after all a pleasant place enough. And they were as happy, it may be, for a week or two, as ever they had been in their lives.

"And now," said Torfrida, "while you see to your army, I must be doing; for I am a lady now, and mistress of great estates. So I must be seeing to the poor."

"But you cannot speak their tongue."

"Can I not? Do you think that in the face of coming to England, and fighting here, and plotting here, and being, maybe, an earl's countess, I have not made Martin Lightfoot teach me your English tongue, till I can speak it as well as you? I kept that hidden as a surprise for you, that you might find out, when you most needed, how Torfrida loved you."

"As if I had not found out already! Oh, woman, woman! I verily believe that God made you alone, and left the devil to make us butchers of men."

Meanwhile went round through all the fens, and north into the Bruneswold, and away again to Lincoln and merry Sherwood, that the Wake was come again. And Gilbert of Ghent, keeping Lincoln Castle for the Conqueror, was perplexed in mind, and looked well to gates, and bars, and sentinels; for Hereward sent him at once a message, that forasmuch as he had forgotten his warning in Bruges Street, and put a rascal cook into his mother's manors, he should ride Odin's horse on the highest ash in the Bruneswold.

On which Gilbert of Ghent, inquiring what Odin's horse might be, and finding it to signify the ash-tree whereon, as sacred to Odin, thieves were hanged by Danes and Norse, made answer:

That he Gilbert had not put his cook into Bourne, nor otherwise harmed Hereward or his. That Bourne had been seized by the king himself, together with Earl Morcar's lands in those parts, as all men knew. That the said cook so pleased the king with a dish of stewed eel-pout, which he served up to him at Cambridge, and which the king had never eaten before, that the king begged the said cook of him Gilbert and took him away; and that after, so he heard, the said cook had begged the said manor of Bourne of the king, without the knowledge or consent of him Gilbert. That he therefore knew naught of the matter. That if Hereward meant to keep the king's peace, he might live in Bourne till Doomsday, for aught he Gilbert cared; but that if he and his men meant

to break the king's peace, and attack Lincoln city, he Gilbert would nail their skins to the door of Lincoln Cathedral, as they used to do by the heathen Danes in old time. And that, therefore, they now understood each other.

At which Hereward laughed, and said that they had done that for many a year.

And now poured into Bourne from every side brave men and true: some great holders dispossessed of their land; some the sons of holders who were not yet dispossessed; some Morcar's men, some Edwin's, who had been turned out by the king; and almost all of them, probably, blood relations of Hereward's, or of King Harold's, or of each other.

To him came "Guenoch and Alutus Gurgan, foremost in all valor and fortitude, tall and large, and ready for work," and with them their three nephews, Godwin Gille, "so called because he was not inferior to that Godwin Guthlacsson who is preached much in the fables of the ancients," and "Douti and Outi the twins, alike in face and manners;" and Godric, the knight of Corby, nephew of the "Count of Warwick, and thus, probably, Hereward's first cousin or nephew;" and Tosti of Davenesse, his kinsman; and Azer Vass, whose father had possessed Lincoln Tower; and Leofwin Moue — that is, the scythe, so called, "because when he was mowing all alone, and twenty country folk set on him with pitchforks and javelins, he slew and wounded almost every one, sweeping his scythe among them as one that moweth;" and Wluncus the Blackface, so called because he once blackened his face with coal, and came unknown among the enemy, and slew ten of them with one

lance; and "Turbertin a great-grandson (?) of Earl Edwin;" and Leofwin Prat (perhaps the ancestor of the ancient and honorable house of Pratt of Ryston), so called from his "Præt" or craft, "because he had often escaped cunningly when taken by the enemy, having more than once killed his keepers;" and the steward of Drayton; and Thurkill, and Utlamhe, *i. e.* the outlaw, Hereward's cook; and Oger, Hereward's kinsman; and "Winter and Liveret, two very famous ones;" and Ranald the Seneschal of Ramsey — "he was the standard-bearer;" and Wulfric the black and Wulfric the white; and Hugh the Norman, a priest; and Wulfard, his brother; and Tosti and Godwin of Rothwell; and Alsin, and Hurkill; and Hugh the Breton, who was Hereward's chaplain; and Whishaw, his brother, "a magnificent knight, which two came with him from Flanders;" — and so forth: — names merely, of whom naught is known, save, in a few cases, from Domesday Book, the manors which they held. But honor to their very names. Honor to the last heroes of the old English race.

These valiant gentlemen, with the housecarles whom, more or fewer, they would bring with them, constituted a formidable force, as after years proved well. But having got his men, Hereward's first care was, doubtless, to teach them that art of war of which they, like true Englishmen, knew nothing.

The art of war has changed little, if at all, by the introduction of gunpowder. The campaigns of Hannibal and Cæsar succeeded by the same tactics as those of Frederic and Wellington; and so, as far as we can judge, did those of the master-general of his age, William of Normandy.

But of those tactics the English knew nothing. Their armies were little more than tumultuous levies, in which men marched and fought under local leaders, often divided by local jealousies. The commissariats of the armies seem to have been so worthless, that they had to plunder friends as well as foes as they went along; and with plunder came every sort of excess — as when the northern men, marching down to meet Harold Godwinsson, and demand young Edwin as their earl, laid waste, seemingly out of mere brute wantonness, the country round Northampton, which must have been in Edwin's earldom, or at least in that of his brother Morcar. And even the local leaders were not over-well obeyed. The reckless spirit of personal independence, especially among the Anglo-Danes, prevented anything like discipline, or organized movement of masses, and made every battle degenerate into a confusion of single combats.

But Hereward had learned that art of war which enabled the French to crush piecemeal, with inferior numbers, the vast but straggling levies of the English. His men, mostly outlaws and homeless, kept together by the pressure from without, and free from local jealousies, resembled rather an army of professional soldiers than a country posse comitatus. And to the discipline which he instilled into them; to his ability in marching and manœuvring troops; to his care for their food and for their transport; possibly also to his training them in that art of fighting on horseback in which the men of Wessex, if not the Anglo-Danes of the East, are said to have been quite unskilled, — in short, to all that he had learned as a mercenary

under Robert the Frison, and among the highly civilized warriors of Flanders and Normandy, must be attributed the fact, that he and his little army defied for years the utmost efforts of the Frenchmen; appearing and disappearing with such strange swiftness, and conquering against such strange odds, as enshrouded the guerilla captain in an atmosphere of myth and wonder, only to be accounted for, in the mind of French as well as English, by the supernatural counsels of his sorceress wife.

But Hereward grew anxious and more anxious, as days and weeks went on, and yet there was no news of Asbiorn and his Danes at Norwich. Time was precious. He had to march his little army to the Wash, and then transport it by boats — no easy matter — to Lynn in Norfolk, as his nearest point of attack. And as the time went on, Earl Warren and Ralph de Guader would have gathered their forces between him and the Danes; and a landing at Lynn might become impossible. Meanwhile there were bruits of great doings in the north of Lincolnshire. Young Earl Waltheof was said to be there, and Edgar the Atheling with him: but what it portended, no man knew. Morcar was said to have raised the centre of Mercia, and to be near Stafford; Edwin to have raised the Welsh, and to be at Chester with Aldytha his sister. And Hereward sent spies along the Ermine Street — the only road, then, toward the northwest of England — and spies northward along the Roman road to Lincoln. But the former met the French in force near Nottingham, and came back much faster than they went. And the latter stumbled on Gilbert of Ghent, riding out of

Lincoln to Folkingham, and had to flee into the fens, and came back much slower than they went.

At last news came. For into Bourne stalked Walfric the Heron, with axe, and bow, and leaping-pole on shoulder; and an evil tale he brought.

The Danes had been beaten utterly at Norwich. Ralph de Guader and his Frenchmen had fought like lions. They had killed many Danes in the assault on the castle. They had sallied out on them as they recoiled; and driven them into the river, drowning many more. The Danes had gone down the Yare again, and out to sea northward, no man knew whither. He, the Heron, prowling about the fenlands of Norfolk to pick off straggling Frenchmen and look out for the Danes, had heard all the news from the landsfolk. He had watched the Danish fleet along the shore as far as Blakeney. But when they came to the isle, they stood out to sea, right northwest. He, the Heron, believed that they were gone for Humber Mouth.

After a while he had heard how Hereward was come again, and had sent round the war-arrow; and it seemed to him that a landless man could be in no better company; wherefore he had taken boat, and come across the deep fen. And there he was, if they had need of him.

"Need of you?" said Hereward, who had heard of the deed at Wrokesham Bridge. "Need of a hundred like you. But this is bitter news."

And he went in to ask counsel of Torfrida, ready to weep with rage. He had disappointed — deceived his men. He had drawn them into a snare. He had promised that the Danes should come. How should he look them in the face?

"Look them in the face? Do that at once: now: without losing a moment. Call them together and tell them all. If their hearts are stanch, you may do great things without the traitor earl. If their hearts fail them, you would have done nothing with them worthy of yourself, had you had Norway as well as Denmark at your back. At least be true with them, as your only chance of keeping them true to you."

"Wise, wise wife," said Hereward, and went out and called his band together, and told them every word, and all that had passed since he left Calais Straits.

"And now I have deceived you, and entrapped you, and I have no right to be your captain more. He that will depart in peace, let him depart, before the Frenchmen close in on us on every side and swallow us up at one mouthful."

Not a man answered.

"I say it again: He that will depart, let him depart."

They stood thoughtful.

Ranald of Ramsey drove the Wake-knot banner firm into the earth, tucked up his monk's frock, and threw his long axe over his shoulder, as if preparing for action.

Winter spoke at last.

"If all go, there are two men here who stay, and fight by Hereward's side as long as there is a Frenchman left on English soil; for they have sworn an oath to heaven and to St. Peter, and that oath will they keep. What say you, Gwenoch, knighted with us at Peterborough?"

Gwenoch stepped to Hereward's side.

"None shall go!" shouted a dozen voices.

"With Hereward we will live and die. Let him lead us to Lincoln, to Nottingham — where he will. We can save England for ourselves without the help of Danes."

"It is well for one at least of you, gentlemen, that you are in this pleasant mind," quoth Ranald the monk.

"Well for all of us, thou valiant purveyor of beef and beer."

"Well for one. For the first man that had turned to go, I would have brained him with this axe."

"And now, gallant gentlemen," said Hereward, "we must take new counsel, as our old has failed. Whither shall we go? For stay here, eating up the country, we must not do."

"They say that Waltheof is in Lindsey, raising the landsfolk. Let us go and join him."

"We can at least find what he means to do. There can be no better counsel. Let us march. Only we must keep clear of Lincoln as yet. I hear that Gilbert has a strong garrison there; and we are not strong enough yet to force it."

So they rode north, and up the Roman road toward Lincoln, sending out spies as they went; and soon they had news of Waltheof. News, too, that he was between them and Lincoln.

"Then the sooner we are with him, the better: for he will find himself in trouble erelong, if old Gilbert comes up with him. So run your best, footmen, for forward we must get."

And as they came up the Roman road, they were aware of a great press of men in front of them, and hard fighting toward.

Some of the English would have spurred for-

ward at once. But Hereward held them back with loud reproaches.

"Will you forget all I have told you in the first skirmish, like so many dogs when they see a bull? Keep together for five minutes more. The pot will not be cool before we get our sup of it. I verily believe that it is Waltheof: and that Gilbert has caught him already."

As he spoke, one part of the combatants broke up, and fled right and left; and a knight in full armor galloped furiously down the road right at them, followed by two or three more.

"Here comes some one very valiant or very much afeard," said Hereward, as the horseman rode right upon him, shouting —

"I am the king!"

"The king?" roared Hereward, and dropping his lance, spurred his horse forward, kicking his feet clear of the stirrups. He caught the knight round the neck, dragged him over his horse's tail, and fell with him to the ground.

The armor clashed: the sparks flew from the old gray Roman flints; and Hereward, rolling over once, rose, and knelt upon his prisoner.

"William of Normandy! yield or die!"

The knight lay still and stark.

"Ride on!" cried Hereward, from the ground. "Ride at them and strike hard! You will soon find out which is which. This booty I must pick for myself. What are you doing?" roared he, after his knights. "Spread off the road, and keep your line, as I told you, and don't override each other! Curse the hot-headed fools! The French will scatter them like sparrows. Run on, men-at-arms, to stop the French if we are broken. And



don't forget Guisnes field and the horses' legs. Now, king, are you come to life yet?"

"You have killed him," quoth Leofric the deacon, whom Hereward had beckoned to stop with him.

"I hope not. Lend me a knife. He is a much slighter man than I fancied," said Hereward, as they got his helmet off.

And when it was off, both started and stared. For they had uncovered, not the beetling brow, Roman nose, and firm curved lip of the Ulysses of the middle age, but the face of a fair lad, with long straw-colored hair, and soft blue eyes staring into vacancy.

"Who are you," shouted Hereward, saying very bad words, "who come here, aping the name of king?"

"Mother! Christina! Margaret! Waltheof Earl!" moaned the lad, raising his head and letting it fall again.

"It is the Atheling!" cried Leofric.

Hereward rose, and stood over the boy.

"Ah! what was I doing to handle him so tenderly? I took him for the Mamzer, and thought of a king's ransom."

"Do you call that tenderly? You have nigh pulled the boy's head off."

"Would that I had! Ah!" went on Hereward, apostrophizing the unconscious Atheling, "ah, that I had broken that white neck once and for all! To have sent thee feet foremost to Winchester, to lie by thy grandfathers and great-grandfathers, and then to tell Norman William that he must fight it out henceforth not with a straw malkin like thee, which the very crows are not afraid

to perch on, but with a cock of a very different hackle, Sweyn Ulfsson, King of Denmark."

And Hereward drew Brain-biter.

"For mercy's sake! you will not harm the lad?"

"If I were a wise man now, and hard-hearted as wise men should be, I should — I should ——" and he played the point of the sword backwards and forwards, nearer and nearer to the lad's throat.

"Master! master!" cried Leofric, clinging to his knees; "by all the saints! What would Our Lady in heaven say to such a deed?"

"Well, I suppose you are right. And I fear what our lady at home might say likewise: and we must not do anything to vex her, you know. Well, let us do it handsomely, if we must do it. Get water somewhere, in his helmet. No, you need not linger. I will not cut his throat before you come back."

Leofric went off in search of water; and Hereward knelt with the Atheling's head on his knee, and on his lip a sneer at all things in heaven and earth. To have that lad stand between him and all his projects; and to be forced, for honor's sake, to let him stand!

But soon his men returned, seemingly in high glee, and other knights with them.

"Hey, lads!" said he, "I aimed at the falcon and shot the goose. Here is Edgar Atheling prisoner. Shall we put him to ransom?"

"He has no money, and Malcolm of Scotland is much too wise to lend him any," said some one. And some more rough jokes passed.

"Do you know, sirs, that he who lies there is

your king?" asked a very tall and noble-looking knight.

"That do we not," said Hereward, sharply. "There is no king in England this day, as far as I know. And there will be none north of the Watling Street, till he be chosen in full husting, and anointed at York, as well as at Winchester or London. We have had one king made for us in the last forty years, and we intend to make the next ourselves."

"And who art thou, who talkest so bold of king-making?"

"And who art thou, who askest so bold who I am!"

"I am Waltheof Siwardsson, the earl, and yon is my army behind me."

"And I am Hereward Leofricsson, the Wake, and yon is my army behind me."

If the two champions had flown at each other's throats, and their armies had followed their example, simply as dogs fly at each other they know not why, no one would have been astonished in those unhappy times.

But it fell not out upon that wise; for Waltheof, leaping from his horse, pulled off his helmet, and seizing Hereward by both hands, cried:

"Blessed is the day which sees again in England Hereward, who has upheld throughout all lands and seas the honor of English chivalry!"

"And blessed is the day in which Hereward meets the head of the house of Siward where he should be, at the head of his own men, in his own earldom. When I saw my friend, thy brother Asbiorn Bulax, brought into the camp at Dunsinane with all his wounds in front, I wept a young

man's tears, and said, 'There ends the glory of the White-Bears' house!' But this day I say — The White-Bears' blood is risen from the grave in Waltheof Siwardsson, who with his single axe kept the gate of York against all the army of the French; and who shall keep against them all England, if he will be as wise as he is brave."

Was Hereward honest in his words? Hardly so. He wished to be honest. As he looked upon that magnificent young man, he hoped and trusted that his words were true. But he gave a second look at the face, and whispered to himself, "Weak, weak. He will be led by priests: perhaps by William himself. I must be courteous: but confide I must not."

The men stood round, and looked with admiration on the two most splendid Englishmen then alive. Hereward had taken off his helmet likewise, and the contrast between the two was as striking as the completeness of each of them in his own style of beauty. It was the contrast between the slow-hound and the deer-hound: each alike high-couraged and high-bred; but the former short, sturdy, cheerful, and sagacious; the latter tall, stately, melancholy, and not overwise withal.

Waltheof was a full head and shoulders taller than Hereward. He was one of the tallest men of his generation, and of a strength which would have been gigantic, but for the too great length of neck and limb, which made him loose and slow in body, as he was somewhat loose and slow in mind. An old man's child, although that old man was one of the old giants, there was a vein of weakness in him, which showed in the arched eyebrow, the sleepy pale blue eye, the small soft mouth, the lazy voice,

the narrow and lofty brain over a shallow brow. His face was not that of a warrior, but of a saint in a painted window; and to his own place he went, and became a saint, in his due time. But that he could out-general William; that he could even manage Gospatric and his intrigues, Hereward expected as little as that his own nephews Edwin and Morcar could do it.

"I have to thank you, noble sir," said Waltheof, languidly, "for sending your knights to our rescue when we were really hard bestead — I fear much by our own fault. Had they told me whose men they were, I should not have spoken to you so roughly as I fear I did."

"There is no offence. Let Englishmen speak their minds, as long as English land is above sea. But how did you get into trouble, and with whom?"

Waltheof told him how he was going round the country, raising forces in the name of the Atheling, when, as they were straggling along the Roman road, Gilbert of Ghent had dashed out on them from a wood, cut their line in two, driven Waltheof one way, and the Atheling another; so that the Atheling had only escaped by riding, as they saw, for his life.

"Well done, old Gilbert!" laughed Hereward. "You must beware, my lord earl, how you venture within reach of that old bear's paw."

"Bear? By the by, Sir Hereward," asked Waltheof, whose thoughts ran loosely right and left, "they told me that you carried a white bear on your banner: but I only see a knot."

"Ah? I have parted with my old bear, all save his skin; for keeping which, by the by, your house ought to have a blood-feud against me. I

slew your great-uncle, or cousin, or some other kinsman, at Gilbert's house in Scotland long ago; and since then I sleep on his skin every night, and used to carry his picture in my banner all day."

"Blood-feuds are solemn things," said Waltheof, frowning. "Karl killed my grandfather Aldred at the battle of Settrington, and his four sons are with the army at York now——"

"For the love of all saints and of England, do not think of avenging that! Every man must now put away old grudges, and remember that he has but one foe, William and his Frenchmen."

"Very nobly spoken. But those sons of Karl —and I think you said you had killed a kinsman of mine?"

"It was a bear, lord earl, a great white bear. Cannot you understand a jest? Or are you going to take up the quarrels of all white bears that are slain between here and Iceland? You will end by burning Crowland Minster then; for there are twelve of your kinsmen's skins there, which Canute gave forty years ago."

"Burn Crowland Minster? St. Guthlac and all saints forbid!" said Waltheof, crossing himself devoutly.

"Are you a monk-monger into the bargain, as well as a dolt? A bad prospect for us, if you are," said Hereward to himself.

"Ah, my dear lord king!" said Waltheof, "and you are recovering?"

"Somewhat," said the lad, sitting up, "under the care of this kind knight."

"He is a monk, Sir Atheling, and not a knight," said Hereward. "Our fen-men can wear a mail-



shirt as easily as a frock, and handle a twybill as neatly as a breviary."

Waltheof shook his head. "It is contrary to the canons of holy church."

"So are many things that are done in England just now. Need has no master. Now, sir earl and Sir Atheling, what are you going to do?"

Neither of them, it seemed, very well knew. They would go to York if they could get there, and join Gospatric and Merlesweyn. And certainly it was the most reasonable thing to be done.

"But if you mean to get to York, you must march after another fashion than this," said Hereward. "See, sir earl, why you were broken by Gilbert; and why you will be broken again, if this order holds. If you march your men along one of these old Roman streets —— By St. Mary, these Romans had more wits than we; for we have spoiled the roads they left us, and never made a new one of our own ——"

"They were heathens and enchanters;" and Waltheof crossed himself.

"And conquered the world. Well — if you march along one of these streets, you must ride as I rode, when I came up to you. You must not let your knights go first, and your men-at-arms straggle after in a tail a mile long, like a scratch pack of hounds, all sizes except each other's. You must keep your footmen on the high street; and make your knights ride in two bodies, right and left, upon the wold, to protect their flanks and baggage."

"But the knights will not. As gentlemen, they have a right to the best ground."

"Then they may go to —— whither they will go,

if the French come upon them. If they are on the flanks, and you are attacked, then they can charge in right and left on the enemy's flank, while the footmen make a stand to cover the wagons."

"Yes — that is very good; I believe that is your French fashion?"

"It is the fashion of common sense, like all things which succeed."

"But, you see, the knights would not submit to ride in the mire."

"Then you must make them. What else have they horses for, while honester men than they trudge on foot?"

"Make them?" said Waltheof, with a shrug and a smile. "They are all free gentlemen, like ourselves."

"And, like ourselves, will come to utter ruin, because every one of them must needs go his own way."

"I am glad," said Waltheof, as they rode along, "that you called this my earldom. I hold it to be mine of course, in right of my father! but the landsfolk, you know, gave it to your nephew Morcar."

"I care not to whom it is given. I care for the man who is on it, to raise these landsfolk, and make them fight. You are here: therefore you are earl."

"Yes, the powers that be are ordained by God."

"You must not strain that text too far, lord earl; for the only power that is, whom I see in England — worse luck for it — is William the Mamzer."

"So I have often thought."

"You have? As I feared!" (To himself) "The pike will have you again, gudgeon!"



"He has with him the Holy Father at Rome, and therefore the Blessed Apostle St. Peter of course. And — is a man right in the sight of heaven, who resists them? I only say it — but where a man looks to the salvation of his own soul — he must needs think thereof seriously at least."

"Oh, are you at that?" thought Hereward. "Tout est perdu. The question is, earl," said he aloud, "simply this. How many men can you raise off this shire?"

"I have raised — not so many as I could wish. Harold and Edith's men have joined me fairly well: but your nephew, Morcar's —— "

"I can command them. I have half of them here already."

"Then — then we may raise the rest?"

"That depends, my lord earl, for whom we fight!"

"For whom? — I do not understand."

"Whether we fight for that lad — child Edgar — or for Sweyn of Denmark, the rightful king of England."

"Sweyn of Denmark! Who should be the rightful king, but the heir of the blessed St. Edward?"

"Blessed old fool! He has done harm to us enough on earth, without leaving us his second-cousin's aunt's malkins to harm us after he is in heaven."

"Sir Hereward, Sir Hereward, I fear thou art not as good a Christian as so good a knight should be."

"Christian or not, I am as good a one as my neighbors. I am Leofric's son. Leofric put Hardicanute on the throne; and your father, who

was a man, helped him. You know what has befallen England, since we Danes left the Danish stock at Godwin's bidding, and put our necks under the yoke of Wessex monks and monk-mongers. You may follow your father's track, or not, as you like. I shall follow my father's, and fight for Sweyn Ulffson, and no man else."

"And I," said Waltheof, "shall follow the anointed of the Lord."

"The anointed of Gospatric and two or three boys!" said Hereward. "Knights! Turn your horses' heads. Right about face all! We are going back to the Bruneswold, to live and die free Danes."

And to Waltheof's astonishment, who had never before seen discipline, the knights wheeled round; the men-at-arms followed them; and Waltheof and the Atheling were left to themselves on Lincoln Heath.



CHAPTER XXIV

HOW ARCHBISHOP ALDRED DIED OF SORROW

IN the tragedies of the next few months Hereward took no part; but they must be looked at near, in order to understand somewhat of the men who were afterwards mixed up with him for weal and woe.

When William went back to the South, the confederates, child Edgar the Atheling, Gospatric, and their friends, had come south again from Durham. It was undignified; a confession of weakness. If a Frenchman had likened them to mice coming out when the cat went away, none could blame him. But so they did; and Asbiorn and his Danes, landing in Humber Mouth, "were met," says the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, "by child Edgar and Earl Waltheof and Merlesweyn, and Earl Gospatric with the men of Northumberland, riding and marching joyfully with an immense army;" not having the spirit of prophecy, or foreseeing those things which were coming on the earth.

To them repaired Edwin and Morcar, the two young earls; Arkill and Karl, "the great thanes;" or at least the four sons of Karl — for accounts differ; and what few else of the northern nobility Tosti had left unmurdered.

The men of Northumberland received the Danes with open arms. They would besiege York. They

would storm the new French keep. They would proclaim Edgar king at York.

In that keep sat two men, one of whom knew his own mind, the other did not. One was William Malet, knight, one of the heroes of Hastings, a noble Norman, and chatelain of York castle. The other was Archbishop Aldred.

Aldred seems to have been a man like too many more, — pious, and virtuous, and harmless enough, and not without worldly prudence: but his prudence was of that sort which will surely swim with the stream, and "honor the powers that be," if they be but prosperous enough. For after all, if success be not God, it is like enough to Him in some men's eyes to do instead. So Archbishop Aldred had crowned Harold Godwinsson, when Harold's star was in the ascendant.[1] And who but Archbishop Aldred should crown William, when his star had cast Harold's down from heaven? He would have crowned Satanas himself, had he only proved himself king de facto — as he asserts himself to be de jure — of this wicked world.

So Aldred, who had not only crowned William, but supported his power north of Humber by all means lawful, sat in York keep, and looked at William Malet, wondering what he would do.

Malet would hold out to the last. As for the new keep, it was surely impregnable. The old walls — the Roman walls on which had floated the flag of Constantine the Great — were surely strong enough to keep out men without battering-rams, balistas, or artillery[2] of any kind. What mattered

[1] So says Florence of Worcester. The Norman chroniclers impute the act to Stigand.

[2] Artillery is here used in its old English meaning, for any kind of warlike engine. Cf. 1 Samuel xx. 40.



Asbiorn's two hundred and forty ships, and their crews of some ten or fifteen thousand men? What mattered the tens of thousands of northern men, with Gospatric at their head? Let them rage and rob round the walls. A messenger had galloped in from William in the Forest of Dean, to tell Malet to hold out to the last. He had galloped out again, bearing for answer, that the Normans could hold York for a year.

But the archbishop's heart misgave him, as from north and south at once came up the dark masses of two mighty armies, broke into columns, and surged against every gate of the city at the same time. They had no battering train to breach the ancient walls: but they had — and none knew it better than Aldred — hundreds of friends inside, who would throw open to them the gates.

One gate he could command from the castle tower. His face turned pale as he saw a mob of armed townsmen rushing down the street towards it; a furious scuffle with the French guards; and then, through the gateway, the open champaign beyond, and a gleaming wave of axes, helms, and spears, pouring in, and up the street.

"The traitors!" he almost shrieked, as he turned and ran down the ladder to tell Malet below.

Malet was firm, but pale as Aldred.

"We must fight to the last," said he, as he hurried down, commanding his men to sally at once en masse and clear the city.

The mistake was fatal. The French were entangled in the narrow streets. The houses, shut to them, were opened to the English and Danes; and, overwhelmed from above, as well as in front, the greater part of the French garrison perished in the

first fight. The remnant were shut up in the castle. The Danes and English seized the houses round, and shot from the windows at every loop-hole and embrasure where a Frenchman showed himself.

"Shoot fire upon the houses!" said Malet.

"You will not burn York? Oh, God! is it come to this?"

"And why not York town, or York minster, or Rome itself with the Pope inside it, rather than yield to barbarians?"

Archbishop Aldred went into his room, and lay down on his bed. Outside was the roar of the battle; and soon, louder and louder, the roar of flame. This was the end of his timeserving and king-making. And he said many prayers, and beat his breast; and then called to his chaplain for clothes, for he was very cold. "I have slain my own sheep," he moaned, "slain my own sheep!"

His chaplain happed him up in bed, and looked out of the window at the fight. There was no lull, neither was there any great advantage on either side. Only from the southward he could see fresh bodies of Danes coming across the plain.

"The carcase is here, and the eagles are gathered together. Fetch me the holy Sacrament, chaplain, and God be merciful to an unfaithful shepherd."

The chaplain went.

"I have slain my own sheep," moaned the archbishop. "I have given them up to the wolves — given mine own minster, and all the treasures of the saints, and — and — I am very cold."

When the chaplain came back with the blessed Sacrament, Archbishop Aldred was more than

cold; for he was already dead and stiff. But William Malet would not yield. He and his Frenchmen fought day after day, with the energy of despair. They asked leave to put forth the body of the archbishop; and young Waltheof, who was a pious man, insisted that leave should be given.

So the archbishop's coffin was thrust forth of the castle-gate, and the monks from the abbey came and bore it away, and buried it in the cathedral church.

And then the fight went on, day after day; and more houses burned, till York was all aflame. On the eighth day the minster was in a light low over Archbishop Aldred's new-made grave. All was burned; minster, churches, old Roman palaces, and all the glories of Constantine the Great and the mythic past.

The besiegers, hewing and hammering gate after gate, had now won all but the keep itself. Then Malet's heart failed him. A wife he had, and children; for their sake he turned coward; and fled by night, with a few men-at-arms, across the burning ruins.

Then, into what once was York, the confederate earls and thanes marched in triumph, and proclaimed Edgar king — a king of dust and ashes.

And where were Edwin and Morcar the meanwhile? It is not told. Were they struggling against William at Stafford, or helping Edric the Wild and his Welshmen to besiege Chester? Probably they were aiding the insurrection, if not at these two points, still at some other of their great earldoms of Mercia and Chester. They seemed to triumph for a while: during the autumn of 1069 the greater part of England seemed lost to William.

Many Normans packed up their plunder and went back to France; and those whose hearts were too stout to return showed no mercy to the English, even as William showed none. To crush the heart of the people, by massacres and mutilations and devastations, was the only hope of the invader: and thoroughly he did his work whenever he had a chance.



CHAPTER XXV

HOW HEREWARD FOUND A WISER MAN IN ENGLAND THAN HIMSELF

THERE have been certain men so great that he who describes them in words — much more pretends to analyze their inmost feelings — must be a very great man himself, or incur the accusation of presumption. And such a great man was William of Normandy, — one of those unfathomable master personages, who must not be rashly dragged on any stage. The genius of a Bulwer, in attempting to draw him, took care, with a wise modesty, not to draw him in too much detail: to confess always, that there was much beneath and behind in William's character, which none, even of his contemporaries, could guess. And still more modest than Bulwer is this chronicler bound to be.

But one may fancy, for once in a way, what William's thoughts were, when they brought him the evil news of York. For we know what his acts were; and he acted up to his thoughts.

Hunting he was, they say, in the Forest of Dean, when first he heard that all England, north of the Watling Street, had broken loose, and that he was king of only half the isle.

Did he — as when, hunting in the Forest of Rouen, he got the news of Harold's coronation

— play with his bow, stringing and unstringing it nervously, till he had made up his mighty mind? Then did he go home to his lodge, and there spread on the rough oak board a parchment map of England, which no child would deign to learn from now, but was then good enough to guide armies to victory, because the eyes of a great general looked upon it?

As he pored over the map, by the light of a bog-deal torch or rush candle, what would he see upon it?

Three separate blazes of insurrection, from northwest to east, along the Watling Street.

At Chester, Edric, "the wild thane," who, according to Domesday Book, had lost vast lands in Shropshire; Algitha, Harold's widow; and Blethwallon and all his Welsh; "the white mantles" swarming along Chester streets, not, as usually, to tear and ravage like the wild cats of their own rocks, but fast friends by blood with Aldytha, once their queen on Penmaenmawr.[1] Edwin, the young earl, Algitha's brother, Hereward's nephew — he must be with them too if he were a man.

Eastward, round Stafford, and the centre of Mercia, another blaze of furious English valor. Morcar, Edwin's brother, must be there, as their earl, if he too was a man.

Then in the fens and Kesteven. What meant this news, that Hereward of St. Omer was come again, and an army with him? That he was levying war on all Frenchmen, in the name of Sweyn, King of Denmark and of England? He is an outlaw, a desperado, a boastful swash-buckler, thought

[1] See the admirable description of the tragedy of Penmaenmawr, in Bulwer's "Harold."



William, it may be, to himself. He found out, in after years, that he had mistaken his man.

And north, at York, in the rear of those three insurrections, lay Gospatric, Waltheof, and Merlesweyn, with the Northumbrian host. Durham was lost, and Comyn burned therein. But York, so boasted William Malet, could hold out for a year. He should not need to hold out for so long.

And last, and worst of all, hung on the eastern coast the mighty fleet of Sweyn, who claimed England as his of right. The foe whom he had most feared ever since he set foot on English soil, a collision with whom had been inevitable all along, was come at last: but where would he strike his blow?

William knew, doubt it not, that the Danes had been defeated at Norwich: he knew, doubt it not, for his spies told him everything, that they had purposed entering the Wash. To prevent a junction between them and Hereward was impossible. He must prevent a junction between them and Edwin and Morcar.

He determined, it seems — for he did it — to cut the English line in two, and marched upon Stafford as its centre.

But all records of these campaigns are fragmentary, confused, contradictory. The Normans fought, and had no time to write history. The English, beaten and crushed, died and left no sign. The only chroniclers of the time are monks. And little could Ordericus Vitalis, or Florence of Worcester, or he of Peterborough, faithful as he was, who filled up the sad pages of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle — little could they see or understand of the masterly strategy which was conquering all Eng-

land for Norman monks, in order that they, following the army like black ravens, might feast themselves upon the prey which others won for them. To them, the death of an abbot, the squabbles of a monastery, the journey of a prelate to Rome, are more important than the manœuvres which decided the life and freedom of tens of thousands.

So all we know is, that William fell upon Morcar's men at Stafford, and smote them with a great destruction; rolling the fugitives west and east, toward Edwin, perhaps at Chester, certainly toward Hereward in the fens.

At Stafford met him the fugitives from York, Malet, his wife and children, with the dreadful news that the Danes had joined Gospatric, and that York was lost.

William burst into fiendish fury. He accused the wretched men of treason. He cut off their hands, thrust out their eyes; threw Malet into prison, and stormed on northward.

He lay at Pontefract for three weeks. The bridges over the Aire were broken down. But at last he crossed and marched on York.

No man opposed him. The Danes were gone down to the Humber. Gospatric and Waltheof's hearts had failed them; and they had retired before the great captain.

Florence of Worcester says that William bought Earl Asbiorn off, giving him much money, and leave to forage for his fleet along the coast.

Doubtless William would have so done if he could. Doubtless the angry and disappointed English raised such accusations against the earl, believing them to be true. But is not this simpler

cause of Asbiorn's conduct to be found in the plain facts? — That he had sailed from Denmark to put Sweyn, his brother, on the throne. He found on his arrival that Gospatric and Waltheof had seized it in the name of Edgar Atheling. What had he to do more in England, save what he did? — go out into the Humber, and winter safely there, waiting till Sweyn should come with reinforcements in the spring?

Then William had his revenge; he destroyed, in the language of Scripture, "the life of the land." Far and wide the farms were burned over their owners' heads, the growing crops upon the ground; the horses were houghed, the cattle driven off; while of human death and misery there was no end. Yorkshire and much of the neighboring counties lay waste for the next nine years. It did not recover itself fully till several generations after.

The Danes had boasted that they would keep their Yule at York. William kept his Yule there instead. He sent to Winchester for the regalia of the Confessor; and in the midst of the blackened ruins, while the English for miles around wandered starving in the snows, feeding on carrion, on rats and mice, and at last upon each other's corpses, he sat in his royal robes, and gave away the lands of Edwin and Morcar to his liegemen. And thus, like the Romans, from whom he derived both his strategy and his civilization, he "made a solitude, and called it peace."

He did not give away Waltheof's lands; and only part of Gospatric's. He wanted Gospatric; he loved Waltheof, and wanted him likewise.

Therefore through the desert which he himself had made he forced his way up to the Tees a sec-

ond time, over snow-covered moors; and this time St. Cuthbert sent no fog, being satisfied presumably with William's orthodox attachment to St. Peter and Rome; so the Conqueror treated quietly with Waltheof and Gospatric, who lay at Durham.

Gospatric got an earldom, from Tees to Tyne; and paid down for it much hard money and treasure, — bought it, in fact, he said.

Waltheof got back his earldom, and much of Morcar's. From the fens to the Tees, was to be his province.

And then, to the astonishment alike of Normans and English, and, it may be, of himself, he married Judith, the Conqueror's niece; and became once more William's loved and trusted friend — or slave.

It seems inexplicable at first sight, — inexplicable, save as an instance of that fascination which the strong sometimes exercise over the weak.

Then William turned southwest. Edwin, wild Edric the dispossessed thane of Shropshire, and the wilder Blethwallon and his Welshmen, were still harrying and slaying. They had just attacked Shrewsbury. William would come upon them by a way they thought not of.

So over the backbone of England, by way probably of Halifax or Huddersfield, through pathless moors and bogs, down towards the plains of Lancashire and Cheshire, he pushed over and on. His soldiers from the plains of sunny France could not face the cold, the rain, the morasses, the hideous gorges, the valiant peasants — still the finest and shrewdest race of men in all England — who set upon them in wooded glens, or rolled stones on them from the limestone crags. They prayed to be dismissed, to go home.



"Cowards might go back," said William; "he should go on." If he could not ride, he would walk. Whoever lagged, he would be foremost. And cheered by his example, the army at last debouched upon the Cheshire flats.

Then he fell upon Edwin, as he had fallen upon Morcar. He drove the wild Welsh through the pass of Mold, and up into their native hills. He laid all waste with fire and sword for many a mile, as Domesday Book testifies to this day. He strengthened the walls of Chester, trampled out the last embers of rebellion, and went down south to Salisbury, King of England once again.

Why did he not push on at once against the one rebellion left alight, that of Hereward and his fen-men?

It may be that he understood him and them. It may be that he meant to treat with Sweyn, as he had done, if the story be true, with Asbiorn. It is more likely that he could do no more; that his army, after so swift and long a campaign, required rest. It may be that the time of service of many of his mercenaries was expired. Be that as it may, he mustered them at Old Sarum — the Roman British burgh which still stands on the down side — and rewarded them, according to their deserts, from the lands of the conquered English.

How soon Hereward knew all this, or how he passed the winter of 1070–71, we cannot tell. But to him it must have been a winter of bitter perplexity.

It was impossible to get information from Edwin; and news from York was almost impossible to get, for Gilbert of Ghent stood between him and it.

He felt himself now pent in, all but trapped.

Since he had set foot last in England ugly things had risen up, on which he had calculated too little; namely, Norman castles. A whole ring of them in Norfolk and Suffolk cut him off from the south. A castle at Cambridge closed the south end of the fens; another at Bedford, the western end; while Lincoln castle to the north cut him off from York.

His men did not see the difficulty, and wanted him to march towards York, and clear all Lindsey and right up to the Humber.

Gladly would he have done so, when he heard that the Danes were wintering in the Humber.

"But how can we take Lincoln castle without artillery, or even a battering ram?"

"Let us march past it, then, and leave it behind."

"Ah, my sons," said Hereward, laughing sadly, "do you suppose that the Mamzer spends his time — and Englishmen's life and labor — in heaping up those great stone mountains, that you and I may walk past them? They are put there just to prevent our walking past, unless we choose to have the garrison sallying out to attack our rear, and cut us off from home, and carry off our women into the bargain, when our backs are turned."

The English swore, and declared that they had never thought of that.

"No. We drink too much ale on this side of the Channel, to think of that — or of anything beside."

"But," said Leofwin Prat, "if we have no artillery, we can make some."

"Spoken like yourself, good comrade. If we only knew how."

"I know," said Torfrida. "I have read of such



things in books of the ancients, and I have watched them making continually — I little knew why, or that I should ever turn engineer."

"What is there that you do not know?" cried they all at once. And Torfrida actually showed herself a fair practical engineer.

But where was iron to come from? Iron for catapult-springs, iron for ram-heads, iron for bolts and bars?

"Torfrida," said Hereward, "you are wise. Can you use the divining-rod?"

"Why, my knight?"

"Because there might be iron-ore in the wolds; and if you could find it by the rod, we might get it up and smelt it."

Torfrida said humbly that she would try; and walked with the divining-rod between her pretty fingers for many a mile in wood and wold, wherever the ground looked red and rusty. But she never found any iron.

"We must take the tires off the cart-wheels," said Leofwin Prat.

"But how will the carts do without? For we shall want them if we march."

"In Provence, where I was born, the wheels were made out of one round piece of wood. Could we not cut wheels like them?" asked Torfrida.

"You are the wise woman as usual," said Hereward.

Torfrida burst into a violent flood of tears, no one knew why.

There came over her a vision of the creaking carts, and the little sleek oxen, dove-colored and dove-eyed, with their canvas mantles tied neatly on to keep off heat and flies, lounging on with

their light load of vine and olive-twigs beneath the blazing southern sun. When should she see the sun once more? She looked up at the brown branches overhead, howling in the December gale, and down at the brown fen below, dying into mist and darkness as the low December sun died down; and it seemed as if her life was dying down with it. There would be no more sun, and no more summers, for her upon this earth.

None certainly for her poor old mother. Her southern blood was chilling more and more beneath the bitter sky of Kesteven. The fall of the leaf had brought with it rheumatism, ague, and many miseries. Cunning old leech-wives treated the French lady with tonics; mugwort, and bog-bean, and good wine enow. But, like David of old, she got no heat; and before Yule-tide came, she had prayed herself safely out of this world, and into the world to come. And Torfrida's heart was the more light when she saw her go.

She was absorbed utterly in Hereward and his plots. She lived for nothing else, hardly even for her child; and clung to her husband's fortunes all the more fiercely, the more desperate they seemed.

So that small band of gallant men labored on, waiting for the Danes, and trying to make artillery and take Lincoln keep. And all the while, so unequal is fortune when God wills — throughout the Southern Weald, from Hastings to Hind-head, every copse glared with charcoal heaps, every glen was burrowed with iron diggings, every hammer-pond stamped and gurgled night and day, smelting and forging English iron, wherewith the Frenchmen might slay Englishmen.

William — though perhaps he knew it not himself — had, in securing Sussex and Surrey, secured the then great ironfield of England, and an unlimited supply of weapons: and to that circumstance, it may be, as much as to any other, the success of his campaigns may be due.

It must have been in one of these December days that a handful of knights came through the Bruneswold, mud- and blood-bespattered, urging on tired horses, as men desperate and foredone. And the foremost of them all, when he saw Hereward at the gate of Bourne, leaped down and threw his arms round his neck, and burst into bitter weeping.

"Hereward, I know you, though you know me not. I am your nephew, Morcar Algarsson; and all is lost."

. . . . . .

As the winter ran on, other fugitives came in, mostly of rank and family. At last Edwin himself came, young and fair, like Morcar; he who should have been the Conqueror's son-in-law; for whom his true-love pined, as he pined, in vain. Where were Sweyn and his Danes? Whither should they go till he came?

"To Ely," answered Hereward.

Whether or not it was his wit which first seized on the military capabilities of Ely is not told. Leofric the deacon, who is likely to know best, says that there were men already there holding out against William, and that they sent for Hereward. But it is not clear from his words, whether they were fugitives, or merely bold Abbot Thurstan and his monks.

It is but probable, nevertheless, that Hereward,

as the only man among the fugitives who ever showed any ability whatsoever, and who was, also, the only leader (save Morcar) connected with the fen, conceived the famous "Camp of Refuge," and made it a formidable fact. Be that as it may, Edwin and Morcar went to Ely, and there joined an Earl Tosti (according to Richard of Ely), unknown to history; a Siward Barn, "the boy or the chieftain," who had been dispossessed of lands in Lincolnshire;[1] and other valiant and noble gentlemen — the last wrecks of the English aristocracy. And there they sat in Abbot Thurstan's hall, and waited for Sweyn and the Danes.

But the worst Job's messenger who, during that evil winter and spring, came into the fen, was Bishop Egelwin of Durham. He it was, most probably, who brought the news of Berkshire laid waste with fire and sword. He it was, most certainly, who brought the worse news still, that Gospatric and Waltheof were gone over to the king. He was at Durham seemingly, when he saw that; and fled for his life, ere evil overtook him: for to yield to William that brave bishop had no mind.

But when Hereward heard that Waltheof was married to the Conqueror's niece, he smote his

[1] Ordericus Vitalis says that he and his brother Aldred were "sons of Ethelgar, the late king's grandson." In another place he makes Ethelgar a "cousin of King Edward." Mr. Forester in his notes to Ordericus Vitalis says (with probability) that the "late king" may have been Edward the Elder, who had a son named Ailward Snow, whose son Algar (Ethelgar) was probably the father of Siward Barn and Aldred, as well as of Brihtric, who had the largest possessions in Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, and Shropshire. If so, we have a fresh illustration of the fact that the lands of England had, before the Conquest, been accumulated in the hands of an aristocracy numerically small, and closely interrelated in blood; a state of things sufficient in itself to account for the easy victory of the French.

hands together, and cursed him, and the mother who bore him to Siward the Stout.

"Could thy father rise from the grave he would split thy craven head in the very lap of the Frenchwoman."

"A hard lap will he find it, Hereward," said Torfrida. "I know her — wanton, false, and vain. Heaven grant he do not rue the day he ever saw her!"

"Heaven grant he may rue it! Would that her bosom were knives and fish-hooks, like that of the statue in the fairy tale. See what he has done for us! He is earl, not only of his own lands, but of poor Morcar's too, and of half his earldom. He is Earl of Huntingdon, of Cambridge, they say — of this ground on which we stand. What right have I here now? How can I call on a single man to arm, as I could in Morcar's name? I am an outlaw here, and a robber; and so is every man with me. And do you think that William did not know that? He saw well enough what he was doing when he set up that great brainless idol as earl again. He wanted to split up the Danish folk, and he has done it. The Northumbrians will stick to Waltheof. They think him a mighty hero, because he held York-gate alone with his own axe against all the French."

"Well, that was a gallant deed."

"Pish! we are all gallant men, we English. It is not courage that we want, it is brains. So the Yorkshire and Lindsey men, and the Nottingham men too, will go with Waltheof. And round here, and all through the fens, every coward, every prudent man even — every man who likes to be within the law, and to feel his head safe on his shoulders

— no blame to him — will draw off from me for fear of this new earl, and leave us to end as a handful of outlaws. I see it all. And William sees it all. He is wise enough, the Mamzer, and so is his father Belial, to whom he will go home some day. Yes, Torfrida," he went on after a pause, more gently, but in a tone of exquisite sadness, "you are right, as you always are. I am no match for that man. I see it now."

"I never said that. Only ——"

"Only you told me again and again that he was the wisest man on earth."

"And yet, for that very reason, I bade you win glory without end by defying the wisest man on earth."

"And do you bid me do it still?"

"God knows what I bid," said Torfrida, bursting into tears. "Let me go pray, for I never needed it more."

Hereward watched her kneeling, as he sat moody, all but desperate. Then he glided to her side and said gently —

"Teach me how to pray, Torfrida. I can say a pater or an ave. But that does not comfort a man's heart, as far as I could ever find. Teach me to pray, as you and my mother pray."

And she put her arms round the wild man's neck, and tried to teach him like a little child.

CHAPTER XXVI

HOW HEREWARD FULFILLED HIS WORDS TO THE PRIOR OF THE GOLDEN BOROUGH

IN the course of that winter died good Abbot Brand. Hereward went over to see him, and found him moaning to himself texts of Isaiah, and confessing the sins of his people.

"Woe to the vineyard that bringeth forth wild grapes. Woe to those that join house to house and field to field, — like us, and the Godwinssons, and every man that could — till we stood alone in the land. Many houses, great and fair, shall be without inhabitants. It is all foretold in holy writ, Hereward, my son. Woe to those who rise early to fill themselves with strong drink, and the tabret and harp are in their feasts: but they regard not the works of the Lord. Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge. Ah — those Frenchmen have knowledge, and too much of it; while we have brains filled with ale instead of justice. Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure, — and all go down into it, one by one. And dost thou think thou shalt escape, Hereward, thou stout-hearted?"

"I neither know nor care; but this I know, that whithersoever I go, I shall go sword in hand."

"They that take the sword shall perish by the sword," said Brand, and blessed Hereward and died.

A week after came news that Thorold of Malmesbury was coming to take the abbey of Peterborough, and had got as far as Stamford, with a right royal train.

Then Hereward sent Abbot Thorold word, that if he or his Frenchmen put foot into Peterborough, he Hereward would burn it over their heads; and that if he rode a mile beyond Stamford town, he should walk back into it barefoot in his shirt.

Whereon Thorold abode at Stamford, and kept up his spirits by singing the song of Roland, which some say he himself composed.

A week after that, and the Danes were come.

A mighty fleet, with Sweyn Ulffson at their head, went up the Ouse towards Ely. Another, with Asbiorn at their head, having joined them off the mouth of the Humber, sailed (it seems) up the Nene. All the chivalry of Denmark and Ireland was come; and with it all the chivalry, and the unchivalry, of the Baltic shores, — Vikings from Jomsburg and Arkona, Gottlanders from Wisby; and with them their heathen tributaries, Wends, Finns, Esthonians, Courlanders, Russians from Novogorod and the heart of Holmgard, Letts who still offered, in the forest of Rugen, human victims to the four-headed Swantowit; foul hordes in sheepskins and primeval filth, who might have been scented from Hunstanton Ness ever since their ships had rounded the Skaw.

Hereward hurried to them with all his men. He was anxious, of course, to prevent their plundering the landsfolk as they went — and that the

savages from the Baltic shore would certainly do, if they could, however reasonable the Danes, Orkneymen, and Irish Ostmen might be.

Food, of course, they must take where they could find it; but outrages were not a necessary, though a too common, adjunct to the process of emptying a farmer's granaries.

He found the Danes in a dangerous mood; sulky and disgusted, as they had good right to be. They had gone to the Humber, and found nothing but ruin; the land waste; the French holding both the shores of the Humber; and Asbiorn cowering in Humber Mouth, hardly able to feed his men. They had come to conquer England, and nothing was left for them to conquer, but a few peat-bogs. Then they would have what there was in them. Every one knew that gold grew up in England out of the ground, wherever a monk put his foot. And they would plunder Crowland. Their forefathers had done it, and had fared none the worse. English gold they would have, if they could not get fat English manors.

"No! not Crowland!" said Hereward. Any place but Crowland, endowed and honored by Canute the Great, — Crowland, whose abbot was a Danish nobleman, whose monks were Danes to a man, of their own flesh and blood. Canute's soul would rise up in Valhalla and curse them, if they took the value of a penny from St. Guthlac. St. Guthlac was their good friend. He would send them bread, meat, ale, all they needed, but woe to the man who set foot upon his ground.

Hereward sent off messengers to Crowland, warning all to be ready to escape into the fens; and entreating Ulfketyl to empty his storehouses

into his barges, and send food to the Danes, ere a day was past. And Ufketyl worked hard and well, till a string of barges wound its way through the fens, laden with beeves and bread, and ale-barrels in plenty; and with monks too, who welcomed the Danes as their brethren, talked to them in their own tongue, blessed them in St. Guthlac's name as the saviors of England; and then went home again, chanting so sweetly their thanks to heaven for their safety that the wild Vikings were awed, and agreed that St. Guthlac's men were wise folk and open-hearted, and that it was a shame to do them harm.

But plunder they must have.

"And plunder you shall have!" said Hereward, as a sudden thought struck him. "I will show you the way to the Golden Borough — the richest minster in England; and all the treasures of the Golden Borough shall be yours, if you will treat Englishmen as friends, and spare the people of the Fens."

It was a great crime in the eyes of men of that time; a great crime, taken simply, in Hereward's own eyes. But necessity has no law. Something the Danes must have, and ought to have; and St. Peter's gold was better in their purses than in that of Thorold and his French monks.

So he led them up the fens and rivers, till they came into the old Nene, which men call Catwater and Muscal now.

As he passed Nomanslandhirne, and the mouth of the Porsand River, he trembled, and trusted that the Danes did not know that they were within three miles of St. Guthlac's sanctuary. But they went on ignorant, and up the Muscal till they saw

St. Peter's towers on the wooded rise, and behind them the great forest which is now Milton Park.

There were two parties in Peterborough minster: a smaller faction of stout-hearted English; a larger one which favored William and the French customs, with Prior Herluin at their head. Herluin wanted not for foresight, and he knew that evil was coming on him. He knew that the Danes were in the fen. He knew that Hereward was with them. He knew that they had come to Crowland. Hereward could never mean to let them sack it. Peterborough must be their point. And Herluin set his teeth, like a bold man determined to abide the worst, and barred and barricaded every gate and door.

That night a hapless churchwarden — Ywar was his name — might have been seen galloping through Milton and Castor Hanglands, and on by Barnack quarries over Southorpe heath, with saddlebags of huge size stuffed with "gospels, mass-robes, cassocks, and other garments, and such other small things as he could carry away." And he came before day to Stamford, where Abbot Thorold lay at his ease in his inn with his hommes d'armes asleep in the hall.

And the churchwarden knocked them up, and drew Abbot Thorold's curtains with a face such as his who

> "drew Priam's curtain in the dead of night,
> And would have told him, half his Troy was burned;"

and told Abbot Thorold that the monks of Peterborough had sent him; and that unless he saddled and rode his best that night, with his meinie of men-at-arms, his Golden Borough would be even as Troy town by morning light.

"A moi, hommes d'armes!" shouted Thorold, as he used to shout whenever he wanted to scourge his wretched English monks at Malmesbury into some French fashion.

The men leaped up and poured in, growling.

"Take me this monk, and kick him into the street for waking me with such news."

"But, gracious lord, the heathen will surely burn Peterborough; and folks said that you were a mighty man of war."

"So I am; but if I were Roland, Oliver, and Turpin rolled into one, how am I to fight Hereward and the Danes with forty men-at-arms? Answer me that, thou dunderheaded English porker."

So Ywar was kicked into the cold, while Thorold raged up and down his chamber in mantle and slippers, wringing his hands over the treasure of the Golden Borough, snatched from his fingers just as he was closing them upon it.

That night the monks of Peterborough prayed in the minster till the long hours passed into the short. The corrodiers, and servants of the monastery, fled from the town outside into the Milton woods. The monks prayed on inside till an hour after matins. When the first flush of the summer's dawn began to show in the northeastern sky, they heard mingling with their own chant another chant, which Peterborough had not heard since it was Medehampstead, three hundred years ago, — the terrible Yuch-hey-saa-saa, the war-song of the Vikings of the North.

Their chant stopped of itself. With blanched faces and trembling knees, they fled, regardless of all discipline, up into the minster tower; and from the leads looked out northeastward on the fen.

The first rays of the summer sun[1] were just streaming over the vast sheet of emerald, and glittering upon the winding river; and on a winding line, too, seemingly endless, of scarlet coats and shields, black hulls, gilded poops and vanes and beak-heads and the flash and foam of innumerable oars.

And nearer and louder came the oar-roll, like thunder working up from the east; and mingled with it, that grim yet laughing Heysaa, which bespoke in its very note the revelry of slaughter.

The ships had all their sails on deck. But as they came nearer, the monks could see the banners of the two foremost vessels.

The one was the red and white of the terrible Dannebrog; the other, the scarcely less terrible Wake-knot of Hereward.

"He will burn the minster! He has vowed to do it. As a child he vowed, and he must do it. In this very minster the fiend entered into him and possessed him; and to this minster has the fiend brought him back to do his will. Satan, my brethren, having a special spite (as must needs be) against St. Peter, rock and pillar of the Holy Church, chose out and inspired this man, even from his mother's womb, that he might be the foe and robber of St. Peter, and the hater of all who, like my humility, honor him, and strive to bring this English land into due obedience to that blessed Apostle. Bring forth the relics, my brethren. Bring forth, above all things, those filings of St. Peter's own chains, the special glory of our monastery — and perhaps its safeguard this day."

[1] "This befell on the fourth day of the Nones of June." So says the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle; from which the details of the sack are taken.

Some such business would any monk of those days have taken it for sure. And yet, so strange a thing is man, he might have been vilest like Herlwin, a shrewd and valiant man.

They brought out all the relics. They brought out the things themselves in a box of gold. They held them out over the walls of the ships, and called on all the saints in whom they believed. But they stopped that line of scarlet, black and gold, as much as their spiritual descendants stop the lava-stream of Vesuvius when they hold out similar matters at them, with a hope unchanged by the experience of eight hundred years. The Heysa rose louder and nearer. The Danes were coming. And they came.

And all the while a thousand skylarks rose from off the fen, and chanted their own chant aloft, as if appealing to heaven against that which man's greed and man's rage and man's superstition had made of this fair earth of God.

The relics had been brought out: but as they would not work, the only thing to be done was to put them back again and hide them safe, lest they should bow down like Bel and stoop like Nebo, and be carried, like them, into captivity themselves, being worth a very large sum of money in the eyes of the more Christian part of the Danish host.

Then to hide the treasures as well as they could; which (says the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle) they hid somewhere in the steeple.

The Danes were landing now. The shout which they gave as they leaped on shore made the hearts of the poor monks sink low. Would they be murdered, as well as robbed? Perhaps not—

probably not. Hereward would see to that. And some wanted to capitulate.

Herluin would not hear of it. They were safe enough. St. Peter's relics might not have worked a miracle on the spot: but they must have done something. St. Peter had been appealed to on his honor, and on his honor he must surely take the matter up. At all events, the walls and gates were strong, and the Danes had no artillery. Let them howl and rage round the holy place, till Abbot Thorold and the Frenchmen of the country rose and drove them to their ships.

In that last thought the cunning Frenchman was not so far wrong. The Danes pushed up through the little town, and to the minster gates: but entrance was impossible; and they prowled round and round like raging wolves about a winter steading, but found no crack of entry.

Prior Herluin grew bold; and coming to the leads of the gateway tower, looked over cautiously, and holding up a certain most sacred emblem — not to be profaned in these pages — cursed them in the name of his whole Pantheon.

"Aha, Herluin! Are you there?" asked a short square man in gay armor. "Have you forgotten the peatstack outside Bolldyke gate, and how you bade light it under me thirty years since?"

"Thou art Winter?" and the prior uttered what would be considered from any but a churchman's lips a blasphemous and bloodthirsty curse.

"Aha! That goes like rain off a duck's back to one who has been a minster scholar in his time. You! Danes! Ostmen! down! If you shoot at that man, I 'll cut your heads off. He is the oldest foe I have in the world, and the only one who

ever hit me without my hitting him again: and nobody shall touch him but me. So down bows, I say."

The Danes — humorous all of them — saw that there was a jest toward, and perhaps some earnest too, and joined in jeering the prior.

Herluin had ducked his head behind the parapet; not from cowardice, but simply because he had on no mail, and might be shot any moment. But when he heard Winter forbid them to touch him, he lifted up his head, and gave his old pupil as good as he brought.

With his sharp swift French priest's tongue he sneered, he jeered, he scolded, he argued; and then threatened. Suddenly changing his tone, in words of real eloquence he appealed to the superstitions of his hearers. He threatened them with supernatural vengeance. He set before them all the terrors of the unseen world.

Some of them began to slink away frightened. St. Peter was an ill man to have a blood feud with.

Winter stood, laughing and jeering in return, for full ten minutes. At last — "I asked, and you have not answered; have you forgotten the old peatstack outside Bolldyke gate? For if you have, the Wake has not. He has piled it against the gate, and it should be burned through by this time. Go and see."

Herluin disappeared with a curse.

"Now, you sea-cocks," said Winter, springing up. "We 'll to the Bolldyke gate, and all start fair."

The Bolldyke gate was on fire; and more, so were the suburbs. There was no time to save

them, as Hereward would gladly have done, for the sake of the corrodiers. They must go: on to the Bolldyke gate. Who cared to put out flames behind him, with all the treasures of Golden Borough before him? In a few minutes all the town was alight. In a few minutes more, the monastery likewise.

A fire is detestable enough at all times, but most detestable by day. At night it is customary; a work of darkness which lights up the dark; picturesque, magnificent, with a fitness Tartarean and diabolic. But under a glaring sun, amid green fields and blue skies, all its wickedness is revealed without its beauty. You see its works, and little more. The flame is hardly noticed. All that is seen is a canker eating up God's works, breaking the bones of its prey with a horrible cracking uglier than all stage-scene glares, cruelly and shamelessly under the very eye of the great, honest, kindly sun.

And that felt Hereward, as he saw Peterborough burn. He could not put his thoughts into words, as men of this day can: so much the better for him, perhaps. But he felt all the more intensely — as did men of his day — the things he could not speak. All he said was, aside to Winter, —

"It is a dark job. I wish it had been done in the dark." And Winter knew what he meant.

Then the men rushed into the Bolldyke gate, while Hereward and Winter stood and looked with their men, whom they kept close together, waiting their commands. The Danes and their allies cared not for the great glowing heap of peat. They cared not for each other, hardly for themselves. They rushed into the gap; they thrust the glow-

ing heap inward through the gateway with their lances: they thrust each other down into it, and trampled over them to fall themselves, rising scorched and withered, and yet struggling on toward the gold of the Golden Borough. One savage Lett caught another round the waist, and hurled him bodily into the fire, crying in his wild tougue, —

"You will make a good stepping-stone for me."

"That is not fair," quoth Hereward, and clove him to the chine.

It was wild work. But the Golden Borough was won.

"We must in now and save the monks," said Hereward, and dashed over the embers.

He was only just in time. In the midst of the great court were all the monks, huddled together like a flock of sheep, some kneeling, most weeping bitterly, after the fashion of monks.

Only Herluin stood in front of them, at bay, a lofty crucifix in his hand. He had no mind to weep. But with a face of calm and bitter wrath, he preferred words of peace and entreaty. They were what the time needed. Therefore they should be given. To-morrow he would write to Bishop Egelsin, to excommunicate with bell, book, and candle, to the lowest pit of Tartarus, all who had done the deed.

But to-day he spoke them fair. However, his fair speeches profited little, not being understood by a horde of Letts and Finns, who howled and bayed at him, and tried to tear the crucifix from his hands, but feared "The white Christ."

They were already gaining courage from their own yells; in a moment more blood would have

been shed, and then a general massacre must have ensued.

Hereward saw it, and shouting "After me, Hereward's men! A Wake! A Wake!" swung Letts and Finns right and left like corn-sheaves, and stood face to face with Herluin.

An angry savage smote him on the hind head full with a stone axe. He staggered, and then looked round and laughed.

"Fool! hast thou not heard that Hereward's armor was forged by dwarfs in the mountain-bowels? Off, and hunt for gold, or it will be all gone."

The Finn, who was astonished at getting no more from his blow than a few sparks, and expected instant death in return, took the hint and vanished jabbering, as did his fellows.

"Now, Herluin the Frenchman!" said Hereward.

"Now, Hereward the robber of saints!" said Herluin.

It was a fine sight, — the soldier and the churchman, the Englishman and the Frenchman, the man of the then world and the man of the then Church, pitted fairly, face to face.

Hereward tried for one moment to stare down Herluin. But those terrible eye-glances, before which Vikings had quailed, turned off harmless from the more terrible glance of the man who believed himself backed by the Maker of the universe and all the hierarchy of heaven.

A sharp, unlovely face it was; though, like many a great churchman's face of those days, it was neither thin nor haggard, but rather round, sleek, of a puffy and unwholesome paleness. But

there was a thin lip above a broad square jaw, which showed that Herluin was neither fool nor coward.

"A robber and a child of Belial thou hast been from thy cradle; and a robber and a child of Belial thou art now. Dare thy last iniquity. Slay the servants of St. Peter on St. Peter's altar, with thy worthy comrades, the heathen Saracens,[1] and set up Mahound with them in the holy place."

Hereward laughed so jolly a laugh, that the prior was taken aback.

"Slay St. Peter's monks? Not even his rats! I am a monk's knight, as my knot testifies. There shall not a hair of your head be touched. Only, I must clear out all Frenchmen hence; and all Englishmen likewise, as storks have chosen to pack with the cranes. Here, Hereward's men! march these traitors and their French prior safe out of the walls, and into Milton Woods, to look after their poor corrodiers."

"Out of this place I stir not. Here I am; and here I will live or die, as St. Peter shall send aid."

But as he spoke, he was precipitated rudely forward and hurried almost into Hereward's arms. The whole body of monks, when they heard Hereward's words, cared to hear no more; but, desperate between fear and joy, rushed forward, bearing away their prior in the midst.

"So go the rats out of Peterborough, and so is my dream fulfilled. Now for the treasure, and then to Ely."

But Herluin burst himself clear of the frantic mob of monks, and turned back on Hereward.

[1] The Danes were continually mistaken by Mediæval churchmen for Saracens, and the Saracens considered to be idolaters. A maumee, or idol, means a Mahomet.

"Thou wast dubbed knight in that church!"

"I know it, man, and that church and the relics of the saints in it are safe therefore. Hereward gives his word."

"That, — but not that only, if thou art a true knight, as thou holdest, Englishman."

Hereward growled savagely, and made an ugly step toward Herluin. That was a point which he would not have questioned.

"Then behave as a knight, and save, save," — as the monks dragged him away, — "save the hospice! There are women — ladies there!" shouted he, as he was borne off.

They never met again on earth; but both comforted themselves in after years, that two old enemies' last deed in common had been one of mercy.

Hereward uttered a cry of horror. If the wild Letts, even the Jomsburgers, had got in, all was lost. He rushed to the door. It was not yet burst; but a bench, swung by strong arms, was battering it in fast.

"Winter! Gery! Siwards! To me, Hereward's men! Stand back, fellows. Here are friends here inside. If you do not, I 'll cut you down."

But in vain. The door was burst, and in poured the savage mob. Hereward, unable to stop them, headed them, or pretended to do so, with five or six of his own men round him, and went into the hall.

On the rushes lay some half-dozen grooms. They were butchered instantly, simply because they were there. Hereward saw, but could not prevent. He ran as hard as he could to the foot

of the wooden stair which led to the upper floor.

"Guard the stair-foot, Winter!" and he ran up.

Two women cowered upon the floor, shrieking and praying, with hands clasped over their heads. He saw that the arms of one of them were of the most delicate whiteness, and judging her to be the lady, bent over her. "Lady! you are safe. I will protect you. I am Hereward."

She sprang up, and threw herself with a scream into his arms.

"Hereward! Hereward! Save me. I am ——"

"Alftruda!" said Hereward.

It was Alftruda; if possible, more beautiful than ever.

"I have got you!" she cried. "I am safe now. Take me away — out of this horrible place — take me into the woods — anywhere — only do not let me be burnt here — stifled like a rat. Give me air! Give me water!" And she clung to him so madly that Hereward, as he held her in his arms and gazed on her extraordinary beauty, forgot Torfrida for the second time.

But there was no time to indulge in evil thoughts, even had any crossed his mind. He caught her in his arms, and, commanding the maid to follow, hurried down the stair.

Winter and the Siwards were defending the foot with swinging blades. The savages were howling round like curs about a bull; and when Hereward appeared above with the women, there was a loud yell of rage and envy.

He should not have the women to himself — they would share the plunder equally — was shouted in half-a-dozen barbarous dialects.



Hereward . . . forgot Torfrida for the second time.



"Have you left any valuables in the chamber?" whispered he to Alftruda.

"Yes, jewels — robes — Let them have all, only save me!"

"Let me pass!" roared Hereward. "There is rich booty in the room above, and you may have it as these ladies' ransom. Them you do not touch. Back, I say, let me pass!"

And he rushed forward. Winter and the housecarles formed round him and the women, and hurried down the hall; while the savages hurried up the ladder, to quarrel over their spoil.

They were out in the courtyard, and safe for the moment. But whither should he take her?

"To Earl Asbiorn," said one of the Siwards. But how to find him?

"There is Bishop Christiern!" And the bishop was caught and stopped.

"This is an evil day's work, Sir Hereward."

"Then help to mend it by taking care of these ladies, like a man of God." And he explained the case.

"You may come safely with me, my poor lambs," said the bishop. "I am glad to find something to do fit for a churchman. To me, my housecarles."

But they were all off plundering.

"We will stand by you and the ladies, and see you safe down to the ships," said Winter; and so they went off.

Hereward would gladly have gone with them, as Alftruda piteously entreated him. But he heard his name called on every side in angry tones.

"Who wants Hereward?"

"Earl Asbiorn — Here he is."

"Those scoundrel monks have hidden all the altar furniture. If you wish to save them from being tortured to death, you had best find it."

Hereward ran with him into the cathedral. It was a hideous sight; torn books and vestments; broken tabernacle-work; foul savages swarming in and out of every dark aisle and cloister, like wolves in search of prey; five or six ruffians aloft upon the rood-screen; one tearing the golden crown from the head of the Crucifix, another the golden footstool from its feet.[1]

As Hereward came up, crucifix and man fell together, crashing upon the pavement, amid shouts of brutal laughter.

He hurried past them, shuddering, into the choir. The altar was bare; the golden pallium which covered it, gone.

"It may be in the crypt below. I suppose the monks keep their relics there," said Asbiorn.

"No! Not there. Do not touch the relics! Would you have the curse of all the saints? Stay! I know an old hiding-place. It may be there. Up into the steeple with me."

And in a chamber in the steeple they found the golden pall, and treasures countless and wonderful.

"We had better keep the knowledge of this to ourselves awhile," said Earl Asbiorn, looking with greedy eyes on a heap of wealth such as he had never beheld before.

"Not we! Hereward is a man of his word, and we will share and share alike."

"What will you?" And Asbiorn caught him by the arm. "This treasure belongs of right to Sweyn the king."

[1] The crucifix was probably of the Greek pattern, in which the figure stood upon a flat slab, projecting from the cross.

"It belongs to St. Peter, who must lend it to-day to save the poor fen-men from robbers and ravishers; and not to any king on earth. Take off thine hand, Jarl, if thou wouldst keep it safe on thy body."

Asbiorn drew back, gnashing his teeth with rage. To strike Hereward was more than he, or any Berserker in his host, dared do; and beside, he felt that Hereward's words were just.

"Hither!" shouted Hereward down the stair. "Up hither, Vikings, Berserkers, and sea-cocks all! Here, Jutlanders, Jomsburgers, Letts, Finns, witches' sons and devils' sons all! Here is gold, here is the dwarf's work, here is the dragon's hoard! Come up and take your Polotaswarf! You would not get a richer out of the Kaiser's treasury. Here, wolves and ravens, eat gold, drink gold, roll in gold, and know that Hereward is a man of his word, and pays his soldiers' wages royally."

They rushed up the narrow stair, trampling each other to death, and thrust Hereward and the earl, choking, into a corner. The room was so full for a few moments, that some died in it. Hereward and Asbiorn, protected by their strong armor, forced their way to the narrow window, and breathed through it, looking out upon the sea of flame below.

"I am sorry for you, jarl," said Hereward. "But for the poor Englishmen's sake, so it must be."

"King Sweyn shall judge of that. Why dost hold my wrist, man?"

"Daggers are apt to get loose in such a press as this."

"Always the Wake," said Asbiorn, with a forced laugh.

"Always the Wake. And as thou saidst, King Sweyn the just shall judge between us."

Jarl Asbiorn swung from him, and into the now thinning press. Soon only a few remained, to search, by the glare of the flames, for what their fellows might have overlooked.

"Now the play is played out," said Hereward, "we may as well go down, and to our ships."

Some drunken ruffians would have burned the church for mere mischief. But Asbiorn, as well as Hereward, stopped that. And gradually they got the men down to the ships; some drunk, some struggling under plunder; some cursing and quarrelling because nothing had fallen to their lot. It was a hideous scene: but one to which Hereward, as well as Asbiorn, was too well accustomed to see aught in it save an hour's inevitable trouble in getting the men on board.

The monks had all fled. Only Leofwin the Long was left, and he lay sick in the infirmary. Whether he was burned therein, or saved by Hereward's men, is not told.

And so was the Golden Borough sacked and burned. Now then, whither?

The Danes were to go to Ely, and join the army there. Hereward would march on to Stamford; secure the town if he could: then to Huntingdon, to secure it likewise; and on to Ely afterwards.

"You will not leave me among these savages?" said Alftruda.

"Heaven forbid! You shall come with me as far as Stamford, and then I will set you on your way."

"My way?" said Alftruda, in a bitter and hopeless tone.

Hereward mounted her on a good horse, and rode beside her, looking — and he well knew it — a very perfect knight. Soon they began to talk. What had brought Alftruda to Peterborough, of all places on earth?

"A woman's fortune. Because I am rich — and some say fair — I am a puppet, a slave, a prey. I was going back to my — to Dolfin."

"Have you been away from him, then?"

"What? Do you not know?"

"How should I know, lady?"

"Yes, most true. How should Hereward know anything about Alftruda? But I will tell you. Maybe you may not care to hear?"

"About you? Anything. I have often longed to know how — what you were doing."

"Is it possible? Is there one human being left on earth who cares to hear about Alftruda? Then listen. You know that when Gospatric fled to Scotland his sons went with him — young Gospatric, Waltheof,[1] and he — Dolfin. Ethelreda, his girl, went too — and she is to marry, they say, Duncan, Malcolm's eldest son by Ingebiorg. So Gospatric will find himself, some day, father-in-law of the King of Scots."

"I will warrant him to find his nest well lined, wherever he be. But of yourself?"

"I refused to go. I could not face again that

[1] This Waltheof Gospatricsson must not be confounded with Waltheof Siwardsson, the young earl. He became a wild border chieftain, then Baron of Atterdale, and then gave Atterdale to his sister, Queen Ethelreda, and turned monk, and at last abbot, of Crowland; crawling home, poor fellow, like many another, to die in peace in the sanctuary of the Danes.

bleak black North. Besides — but that is no concern of Hereward's ——"

Hereward was on the point of saying, "Can anything concern you, and not be interesting to me?"

But she went on:

"I refused, and ——"

"And he misused you?" asked he, fiercely.

"Better if he had. Better if he had tied me to his stirrup, and scourged me along into Scotland, than have left me to new dangers and to old temptations."

"What temptations?"

Alftruda did not answer, but went on —

"He told me, in his lofty Scots fashion, that I was free to do what I list; that he had long since seen that I cared not for him, and that he would find many a fairer lady in his own land."

"There he lied. So you did not care for him? He is a noble knight."

"What is that to me? Women's hearts are not to be bought and sold with their bodies, as I was sold. Care for him? I care for no creature upon earth. Once I cared for Hereward, like a silly child. Now I care not even for him."

Hereward was sorry to hear that. Men are vainer than women, just as peacocks are vainer than peahens; and Hereward was — alas for him! — a specially vain man. Of course, for him to fall in love with Alftruda would have been a shameful sin; he would not have committed it for all the treasures of Constantinople: but it was a not unpleasant thought that Alftruda should fall in love with him. But he only said, tenderly and courteously —

"Alas! poor lady!"

"Poor lady. Too true, that last. For whither am I going now? Back to that man once more."

"To Dolfin?"

"To my master, like a runaway slave. I went down south to Queen Matilda. I knew her well, and she was kind to me, as she is to all things that breathe. But now that Gospatric is come into the king's grace again, and has bought the earldom of Northumbria, from Tees to Tyne ——"

"Bought the earldom!"

"That has he; and paid for it right heavily."

"Traitor and fool! He will not keep it seven years. The Frenchman will pick a quarrel with him, and cheat him out of earldom and money too."

The which William did, within three years.

"May it be so! But when he came into the king's grace, he must needs demand me back in his son's name."

"What does Dolfin want with you?"

"His father wants my money, and stipulated for it with the king. And besides, I suppose I am a pretty plaything enough still."

"You? You are divine, perfect. Dolfin is right. How could a man who had once enjoyed you, live without you?"

Alftruda laughed, a laugh full of meaning; but what that meaning was Hereward could not divine.

"So now," she said, "what Hereward has to do, as a true and courteous knight, is to give Alftruda safe conduct, and, if he can, a guard; and to deliver her up royally and knightly to his old friend and fellow-warrior, Dolfin Gospatricsson, earl of whatever he can lay hold of for the current month."

"Are you in earnest?"

Alftruda laughed one of her strange laughs, looking straight before her. Indeed she had never looked Hereward in the face during the whole ride.

"What are those open holes? Graves?"

"They are Barnack stone quarries, which Waltheof the Wittol has just given away to Crowland. Better that, though, than keep them for his new French cousins to build castles withal."

"So? That is pity. I thought they had been graves; and then you might have covered me up in one of them, and left me to sleep in peace."

"What can I do for you, Alftruda, my old playfellow, Alftruda, whom I saved from the bear?"

"If Alftruda had foreseen the second monster into whose jaws she was to fall, she would have prayed you to hold that terrible hand of yours, which never since, men say, has struck without victory and renown. You won your first honor for my sake. But who am I now, that you should turn out of your glorious path for me?"

"I will do anything — anything. But why miscall this noble prince a monster?"

"If he were fairer than St. John, more wise than Solomon, and more valiant than King William, he is to me a monster; for I loathe him, and I know not why. But do your duty as a knight, sir. Convey the lawful wife to her lawful spouse."

"What cares an outlaw for law, in a land where law is dead and gone? I will do what I — what you like. Come with me to Torfrida at Bourne; and let me see the man who dares try to take you out of my hand."

Alftruda laughed again.

"No, no. I should interrupt the doves in their nest. Besides, the billing and cooing might make me envious. And I, alas! who carry misery with me round the land, might make your Torfrida jealous."

Hereward was of the same opinion, and rode silent and thoughtful through the great woods which are now the noble park of Burghley.

"I have found it!" said he at last. "Why not go to Gilbert of Ghent, at Lincoln?"

"Gilbert? Why should he befriend me?"

"He will do that, or anything else, which is for his own profit."

"Profit? All the world seems determined to make profit out of me. I presume you would, if I had come with you to Bourne."

"I do not doubt it. This is a very wild sea to swim in; and a man must be forgiven if he catches at every bit of drift timber."

"Selfishness, selfishness everywhere; — and I suppose you expect to gain by sending me to Gilbert of Ghent?"

"I shall gain nothing, Alftruda, save the thought that you are not so far from me — from us — but that we can hear of you — send succor to you if you need."

Alftruda was silent. At last:

"And you think that Gilbert would not be afraid of angering the king?"

"He would not anger the king. Gilbert's friendship is more important to William, at this moment, than that of a dozen Gospatrics. He holds Lincoln town, and with it the key of Waltheof's earldom: and things may happen,

Alftruda — I tell you: but if you tell Gilbert, may Hereward's curse be on you!"

"Not that! Any man's curse save yours!" said she, in so passionate a voice that a thrill of fire ran through Hereward. And he recollected her scoff at Bruges, — "So he could not wait for me?" And a storm of evil thoughts swept through him. "Would to heaven!" said he to himself, crushing them gallantly down, "I had never thought of Lincoln. But there is no other plan."

But he did not tell Alftruda, as he had meant to do, that she might see him soon in Lincoln castle as its conqueror and lord. He half hoped that when that day came, Alftruda might be somewhere else.

"Gilbert can say," he went on, steadying himself again, "that you feared to go north on account of the disturbed state of the country; and that, as you had given yourself up to him of your own accord, he thought it wisest to detain you, as a hostage for Dolfin's allegiance."

"He shall say so. I will make him say so."

"So be it. Now, here we are at Stamford town; and I must to my trade. Do you like to see fighting, Alftruda, — the man's game, the royal game, the only game worth a thought on earth? For you are like to see a little in the next ten minutes."

"I should like to see you fight. They tell me none is so swift and terrible in the battle as Hereward. How can you be otherwise, who slew the bear — when we were two happy children together? But shall I be safe?"

"Safe? of course," said Hereward, who longed,

peacock-like, to show off his prowess before a lady who was — there was no denying it — far more beautiful than even Torfrida.

But he had no opportunity to show off that prowess. For, as he galloped in over Stamford bridge, Abbot Thorold galloped out at the opposite end of the town through Casterton, and up the Roman road to Grantham.

After whom Hereward sent Alftruda (for he heard that Thorold was going to Gilbert at Lincoln) with a guard of knights; bidding them do him no harm, but saying that Hereward knew him to be a preux chevalier and lover of fair ladies; that he had sent him a right fair one to bear him company to Lincoln; and hoped that he would sing to her on the way the song of Roland.

And Alftruda, who knew Thorold, went willingly, since it could no better be.

After which, according to Gaimar, Hereward tarried three days at Stamford, laying a heavy tribute on the burgesses for harboring Thorold and his Normans; and also surprised at a drinking bout a certain special enemy of his, and chased him from room to room sword in hand, till he took refuge shamefully in an outhouse, and begged his life. And when his knights came back from Grantham, he marched to Bourne.

"The next night," says Richard of Ely, or it may be Leofric himself, "Hereward saw in his dreams a man standing by him of inestimable beauty, old of years, terrible of countenance, in all the raiment of his body more splendid than all things which he had ever seen, or conceived in his mind; who threatened him with a great club which he carried in his hand, and with a fearful doom,

that he should take back to his church all that had been carried off the night before, and have them restored utterly, each in its place, if he wished to provide for the salvation of his soul, and escape on the spot a pitiable death. But when awakened, he was seized with a divine terror, and restored in the same hour all that he took away, and so departed, going onward with all his men."

So says the chronicler, wishing, as may be well believed, to advance the glory of St. Peter, and to purge his hero's name from the stain of sacrilege. Besides, the monks of Peterborough, no doubt, had no wish that the world should spy out their nakedness, and become aware that the Golden Borough was stripped of all its gold.

Nevertheless, truth will out. Golden Borough was Golden Borough no more. The treasures were never restored; they went to sea with the Danes, and were scattered far and wide—to Norway, to Ireland, to Denmark; "all the spoils," says the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, "which reached the latter country, being the pallium and some of the shrines and crosses; and many of the other treasures they brought to one of the king's towns, and laid them up in the church. But one night, through their carelessness and drunkenness, the church was burned, with all that was therein. Thus was the minster of Peterborough burned and pillaged. May Almighty God have pity on it in His great mercy. And thus Abbot Turold came to Peterborough. . . . When Bishop Egelric heard this, he excommunicated the men who had done this evil. There was a great famine this year."

Hereward, when blamed for the deed, said

always that he did it "because of his allegiance to the monastery."

And some of the treasure, at least, he must have surely given back, he so appeased the angry shade of St. Peter. For on that night, when marching past Stamford, he and his lost their way. "To whom a certain wonder happened, and a miracle, if it can be said that such would be worked in favor of men of blood. For while in the wild night and dark they wandered in the wood, a huge wolf met them, wagging his tail like a tame dog, and went before them on a path. And they, taking the gray beast in the darkness for a white dog, cheered on each other to follow him to his farm, which ought to be hard by. And in the silence of the midnight, that they might see their way, suddenly candles appeared, burning, and clinging to the lances of all the knights — not very bright, however; but like those which the folk called candelæ nympharum — wills of the wisp. But none could pull them off, or altogether extinguish them, or throw them from their hands. And thus they saw their way, and went on, although astonished out of mind, with the wolf leading them until day dawned, and they saw, to their great astonishment, that he was a wolf. And as they questioned among themselves about what had befallen, the wolf and the candles disappeared, and they came whither they had been minded, beyond Stamford town, thanking God, and wondering at what had happened."

After which Hereward took Torfrida, and his child, and all he had, and took ship at Bardeney, and went for Ely. Which when Earl Warrenne heard, he laid wait for him, seemingly near Littleport: but got nothing thereby, according to

Richard of Ely, but the pleasure of giving and taking a great deal of bad language; and (after his men had refused, reasonably enough, to swim the Ouse and attack Hereward) an arrow, which Hereward, " modicum se inclinans," stooping forward, says the chronicler — who probably saw the deed — shot at him across the Ouse, as the earl stood cursing on the top of the dyke. Which arrow flew so stout and strong, that though it sprang back from Earl Warrenne's hauberk, it knocked him almost senseless off his horse, and forced him to defer his purpose of avenging Sir Frederic his brother.

After which Hereward threw himself into Ely, and assumed, by consent of all, the command of the English who were therein.

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW THEY HELD A GREAT MEETING IN THE HALL OF ELY

THERE sat round the hall of Ely all the magnates of the east land and east sea. The abbot was on his high seat; and on a seat higher than his, prepared specially, Sweyn Ulfsson, King of Denmark and England. By them sat the bishops, Egelwin the Englishman and Christiern the Dane; Asbiorn; the young earls Edwin and Morcar, and Sweyn's two sons; and, it may be, the sons of Tosti Godwinsson, and Arkill the great thane, and Siward Barn, and Hereward himself. Below them were knights, Vikings, captains, great holders from Denmark, and the prior and inferior officers of Ely minster. And at the bottom of the misty hall, on the other side of the column of blue vapor which went trembling up from the great heap of burning turf amidst, were housecarles, monks, wild men from the Baltic shores, crowded together to hear what was done in that parliament of their betters.

They spoke like free Danes; the betters from the upper end of the hall, but every man as he chose. They were in full Thing; in parliament, as their forefathers had been wont to be for countless ages. Their House of Lords and their House

of Commons were not yet defined from each other; but they knew the rules of the house, the courtesies of debate; and, by practice of free speech, had educated themselves to bear and forbear, like gentlemen.

But the speaking was loud and earnest, often angry that day. "What was to be done?" was the question before the house.

"That depended," said Sweyn, the wise and prudent king, "on what could be done by the English to co-operate with them." And what that was, has been already told.

"When Tosti Godwinsson, ye bishops, jarls, knights, and holders, came to me five years ago, and bade me take my rights in this land of England, I answered him that I had not wit enough to do the deeds which Canute my uncle did; and so sat still in peace. I little thought that I should have lost in five years so much of those small wits to which I confessed, that I should come after all to take my rightful kingdom of England, and find two kings in it already, both more to the English mind than I am. While William the Frenchman is king by the sword, and Edgar the Englishman king by proclamation of earls and thanes, there seems no room here for Sweyn, nephew of Canute, king of kings."

"We will make room for you! We will make a rid road from here to Winchester!" shouted the meeting, with one voice.

"It is too late. What say you, Hereward Leofricsson, who go for a wise man among men?"

Hereward rose, and spoke gracefully, earnestly, eloquently; but he could not deny Sweyn's plain words.

"The Wake beats about the bush," said Jarl Asbiorn, rising when Hereward sat down. "None knows better than he that all is over. Earl Edwin and Earl Morcar, who should have helped us along Watling Street, are here fugitives. Earl Gospatric and Earl Waltheof are William's men now, soon to raise the landsfolk against us. We had better go home, before we have eaten up the monks of Ely."

Then Hereward rose again, and without an openly insulting word poured forth his scorn and rage upon Asbiorn. Why had he not kept to the agreement which he and Countess Gyda had made with him through Tosti's sons? Why had he wasted time and men from Dover to Norwich, instead of coming straight into the fens, and marching inland to succor Morcar and Edwin? Asbiorn had ruined the plan, and he only, if it was ruined.

"And who was I, to obey the Wake?" asked Asbiorn, fiercely.

"And who wert thou, to disobey me?" asked Sweyn, in a terrible voice. "Hereward is right. We shall see what thou sayest to all this, in full Thing at home in Denmark."[1]

Then Edwin rose, entreating peace. "They were beaten. The hand of God was against them. Why should they struggle any more? Or, if they struggled on, why should they involve the Danes in their own ruin?"

Then man after man rose, and spoke rough Danish common sense. They had come hither to win England. They had found it won already. Let them take what they had got from Peterborough and go.

[1] Asbiorn is said to have been outlawed on his return home.

Then Winter sprang up. "Take the pay, and sail off with it, without having done the work? That would be a noble tale to carry home to your fair wives in Jutland. I shall not call you niddering, being a man of peace, as all know." Whereat all laughed: for the doughty little man had not a hand's breadth on head or arm without a scar. "But if your ladies call you so, you must have a shrewd answer to give, beside knocking them down."

Sweyn spoke without rising: "The good knight forgets that this expedition has cost Denmark already nigh as much as Harold Hardraade's cost Norway. It is hard upon the Danes, if they are to go away empty-handed as well as disappointed."

"The king has right!" cried Hereward. "Let them take the plunder of Peterborough as pay for what they have done, and what beside they would have done if Asbiorn the Jarl — Nay, men of England, let us be just! — what Asbiorn himself would have done if there had been heart and wit, one mind and one purpose, in England. The Danes have done their best. They have shown themselves what they are, our blood and kin. I know that some talk of treason, of bribes. Let us have no more such vain and foul suspicions. They came as our friends; and as our friends let them go, and leave us to fight out our own quarrel to the last drop of blood."

"Would God," said Sweyn, "thou wouldest go too, thou good knight! Hear, jarls and gentlemen of England! Sweyn Ulfsson offers to every one of you who will come to Denmark with him, shelter and hospitality till better times shall come."

Then arose a mixed cry. Some would go, some would not. Some of the Danes took the proposal cordially; some feared bringing among themselves men who would needs want land, of which there was none to give. If the English came, they must go up the Baltic, and conquer fresh lands for themselves from heathen Letts and Finns.

Then Hereward rose again, and spoke so nobly and so well that all ears were charmed.

They were Englishmen; and they would rather die in their own merry England than win new kingdoms in the cold northeast. They were sworn, the leaders of them, to die or conquer, fighting the accursed Frenchman. They were bound to St. Peter, and to St. Guthlac, and to St. Felix of Ramsey, and St. Etheldreda the holy virgin, beneath whose roof they stood, to defend against Frenchmen the saints of England whom they despised and blasphemed, whose servants they cast out, thrust into prison, and murdered, that they might bring in Frenchmen from Normandy, Italians from the Pope of Rome. Sweyn Ulfsson spoke as became him, as a prudent and a generous prince; the man who alone of all kings defied and fought the great Hardraade till neither could fight more; the true nephew of Canute the king of kings: and they thanked him: but they would live and die Englishmen.

And every Englishman shouted, "Hereward is right! We will live and die fighting the French."

And Sweyn Ulfsson rose again, and said with a great oath, "That if there had been three such men as Hereward in England, all would have gone well."

Hereward laughed. "Thou art wrong for once,

wise king. We have failed, just because there were a dozen men in England as good as I, every man wanting his own way; and too many cooks have spoiled the broth. What we wanted is not a dozen men like me, but one like thee, to take us all by the back of the neck and shake us soundly, and say, 'Do that, or die!'"

And so, after much talk, the meeting broke up. And when it broke up, there came to Hereward in the hall a noble-looking man of his own age, and put his hand within his, and said —

"Do you not know me, Hereward Leofricsson?"

"I know thee not, good knight, more pity; but by thy dress and carriage, thou shouldst be a true Vikingsson."

"I am Sigtryg Ranaldsson, now King of Waterford. And my wife said to me, 'If there be treachery or faint-heartedness, remember this — that Hereward Leofricsson slew the ogre, and Hannibal of Marazion likewise, and brought me safe to thee. And, therefore, if thou provest false to him, niddering thou art; and no niddering is spouse of mine.'"

"Thou art Sigtryg Ranaldsson!" cried Hereward, clasping him in his arms, as the scenes of his wild youth rushed across his mind. "Better is old wine than new, and old friends likewise."

"And I, and my five ships, are thine to death. Let who will go back."

"They must go," said Hereward, half-peevishly. "Sweyn has right, and Asbiorn too. The game is played out. Sweep the chessmen off the board, as Earl Ulf did by Canute the king."

"And lost his life thereby. I shall stand by, and see thee play the last pawn."

"And lose thy life in like wise."

"What matter? I heard thee sing,—

> "'A bed-death, a priest death,
> A straw death, a cow death,
> Such death likes not me.'

Nor likes it me, either, Hereward Leofricsson."

So the Danes sailed away: but Sigtryg Ranaldsson and his five ships remained.

Hereward went up to the minster tower; and watched the Ouse flashing with countless oars northward toward Southrey Fen. And when they were all out of sight, he went back, and lay down on his bed, and wept — once and for all. Then he arose, and went down into the hall to abbots and monks, and earls and knights, and was the boldest, cheeriest, wittiest of them all.

"They say," quoth he to Torfrida that night, "that some men have gray heads on green shoulders. I have a gray heart in a green body."

"And my heart is growing very gray, too," said Torfrida.

"Certainly not thy head." And he played with her raven locks.

"That may come, too; and too soon."

For, indeed, they were in very evil case.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HOW THEY FOUGHT AT ALDRETH

WHEN William heard that the Danes were gone, he marched on Ely, as on an easy prey.

Ivo Taillebois came with him, hungry after those Spalding lands, the rents whereof Hereward had been taking for his men for now twelve months. William de Warrenne was there, vowed to revenge the death of Sir Frederic, his brother. Ralph Guader was there, flushed with his success at Norwich. And with them were all the Frenchmen of the east, who had been either expelled from their lands or were in fear of expulsion.

With them, too, was a great army of mercenaries, ruffians from all France and Flanders, hired to fight for a certain term, on the chance of plunder or of fiefs in land. Their brains were all aflame with the tales of inestimable riches hidden in Ely. There were there the jewels of all the monasteries round; there were the treasures of all the fugitive English nobles; there were there — what was there not? And they grumbled, when William halted them and hutted them at Cambridge, and began to feel cautiously the strength of the place — which must be strong, or Hereward and the

English would not have made it their camp of refuge.

Perhaps he rode up to Madingley windmill; and saw fifteen miles away, clear against the sky, the long line of what seemed naught but a low upland park, with the minster tower among the trees; and between him and them a rich champaign of grass, over which it was easy enough to march all the armies of Europe; and thought Ely an easy place to take. But men told him that between him and those trees lay a black abyss of mud and peat and reeds, Haddenham fen and Smithy fen, with the deep sullen Westwater or "Ald-reche"[1] of the Ouse winding through them. The old Roman road to Stretham was sunk and gone long since under the bog, whether by English neglect, or whether (as some think) by actual and bodily sinking of the whole land. The narrowest space between dry land and dry land was a full half-mile; and how to cross that half-mile, no man knew.

What were the approaches on the west? There were none? Beyond Earith, where now run the great washes of the Bedford Level, was a howling wilderness of meres, eas, reed-ronds, and floating alder-beds, through which only the fen-men wandered, with leaping-pole and log canoe.[2]

[1] I give the supposed etymologies of one of the various spellings of "Alrehede," now Aldreth. A better is Alre-hythe, the Alder-shore; a better still, perhaps, St. Etheldreda, or Audrey, herself. St. Audrey's causeway leads to the spot; St. Audrey's well is, or was, on the slope above; and the name of the place may be simply Audrey's Hythe.

[2] The "bridge two miles long," which the "Liber Eliensis" says that William made to the west of the isle, is surely only a traditional exaggeration of his repairs of Aldreth causeway to the southwest. On the west, the Isle must have been utterly unapproachable.

What in the east? The dry land neared the island on that side. And it may be that William rowed round by Burwell to Fordham and Soham, and thought of attempting the island by way of Barraway; and saw beneath him a labyrinth of islands, meres, fens, with the Cam, increased by the volume of the Ouse, spreading far deeper and broader than now between Barraway and Thetford-in-the-Isle; and saw, too, that a disaster in that labyrinth might be a destruction.[1]

So he determined on the near and straight path, through Long Stanton and Willingham, down the old bridle-way from Willingham ploughed field; — every village there, and in the isle likewise, had and has still its "field," or ancient clearing of ploughed land, — and then to try that terrible half-mile, with the courage and wit of a general to whom human lives were as those of the gnats under the hedge.

So all his host camped themselves in Willingham field, by the old earthwork which men now call Belsar's Hills; and down the bridle-way poured countless men, bearing timber and fagots, cut from all the hills, that they might bridge the black half-mile.

They made a narrow firm path through the reeds, and down to the brink of the Ouse, if brink it could be called, where the water, rising and falling a foot or two each tide, covered the floating

[1] It may be well to explain to those who do not know the Fens, that the Ouse formerly parted at the Isle of Ely, half its waters running eastward by Aldreth into the Cam, half wandering northward to inundate vast morasses to the west of the isle. Through those morasses (now fertile fields), and above their level, the great works of the Bedford Level now convey the Ouse straight to the tide at Denver sluice.

peat for many yards, before it sank into a brown depth of bottomless slime. They would make a bottom for themselves by driving piles.

The piles would not hold; and they began to make a floating bridge with long beams, say the chroniclers, and blown-up cattle-hides to float them.

Soon they made a floating-sow, and thrust it on before them as they worked across the stream; for they were getting under shot from the island.

Meanwhile the besieged had not been idle. They had thrown up a turf rampart on the island shore, and "ante-muralia et propugnacula,"—doubtless, overhanging "hoardings," or scaffolds, through the floor of which they could shower down missiles.[1] And so they awaited the attack, contenting themselves with gliding in and out of the reeds in their canoes, and annoying the builders with arrows and cross-bow bolts.

At last the bridge was finished, and the sow safe across the Westwater; and thrust in, as far as it would float, among the reeds on the high tide. They in the fort could touch it with a pole.

The English would have destroyed it if they could. But the Wake bade them leave it alone. He had watched all their work, and made up his mind to the event.

"The rats have set a trap for themselves," he said to his men; "and we shall be fools to break it up till the rats are safe inside."

So there the huge sow lay, black and silent, showing nothing to the enemy but a side of strong plank, covered with hide to prevent its being

[1] Was this "Hereward's Fort," which was still shown in the Fens in the days of Roger of Wendover?

burned. It lay there for three hours, and the Wake let it lie.

He had never been so cheerful, so confident. "Play the man this day, every one of you; and ere nightfall you will have taught the Frenchman once more the lesson of York. He seems to have forgotten that. It is time to remind him of it."

And he looked to his bow and to his arrows, and prepared to play the man himself; as was the fashion in those old days, when a general proved his worth by hitting harder and more surely than any of his men.

At last the army was in motion, and Willingham field opposite was like a crawling ants' nest. Brigade after brigade moved down to the reed beds, and the assault began.

And now advanced along the causeway, and along the bridge, a dark column of men, surmounted by glittering steel; knights in complete mail, footmen in leather coats and jerkins; at first orderly enough, each under the banner of his lord: but more and more mingled and crowded, as each hurried forward, eager for his selfish share of the inestimable treasures of Ely. They pushed along the bridge. The mass became more and more crowded; men stumbled over each other, and fell off into the mire and water, calling vainly for help: but their comrades hurried on unheeding, in the mad thirst for spoil.

On they came in thousands; and fresh thousands streamed out of the fields, as if the whole army intended to pour itself into the isle at once.

"They are numberless," said Torfrida, in a serious and astonished voice, as she stood by Hereward's side.

"Would they were!" said Hereward. "Let them come on, thick and threefold. The more their numbers, the fatter will the fish below be, before to-morrow morning. Look there, already!"

And already the bridge was swaying, and sinking beneath their weight. The men, in places, were ankle deep in water. They rushed on all the more eagerly; filled the sow, and swarmed up to its roof.

Then, what with its own weight, what with the weight of the laden bridge which dragged upon it from behind, the huge sow began to tilt backwards, and slide down the slimy bank.

The men on the top tried vainly to keep their footing, to hurl grapnels into the rampart, to shoot off their quarrels and arrows.

"You must be quick, Frenchmen," shouted Hereward, in derision, "if you mean to come on board here."

The French knew that well; and as Hereward spoke, two panels in the front of the sow creaked on their hinges, and dropped landward, forming two drawbridges, over which reeled to the attack a close body of knights, mingled with soldiers bearing scaling ladders.

They recoiled. Between the ends of the drawbridges and the foot of the rampart was some two fathoms' breadth of black ooze. The catastrophe which the Wake had foreseen was come, and a shout of derision arose from the unseen defenders above.

"Come on, leap it like men! Send back for your horses, knights, and ride them at it like bold huntsmen!"

The front rank could not but rush on; for the pressure behind forced them forward, whether

they would or not. In a moment they were wallowing waist deep; trampled on; disappearing under their struggling comrades, who disappeared in their turn.

"Look, Torfrida! If they plant their scaling ladders, it will be on a foundation of their comrades' corpses."

Torfrida gave one glance through the openings of the hoarding, upon the writhing mass below, and turned away in horror. The men were not so merciful. Down between the hoarding beams rained stones, javelins, arrows, increasing the agony and death. The scaling ladders would not stand in the mire; if they had stood a moment, the struggles of the dying would have thrown them down. And still fresh victims pressed on from behind, shouting, "Dex Aie! On to the gold of Ely!" and still the sow, under the weight, slipped farther and farther back into the stream, and the foul gulf widened between besiegers and besieged.

At last one scaling ladder was planted upon the bodies of the dead, and hooked firmly on the gunwale of the hoarding. Ere it could be hurled off again by the English, it was so crowded with men that even Hereward's strength was insufficient to lift it off. He stood at the top, ready to hew down the first-comer; and he hewed him down.

But the French were not to be daunted. Man after man dropped dead from the ladder top,—man after man took his place; sometimes scrambling over each other's backs.

The English, even in the insolence of victory, cheered them with honest admiration. "You are fellows worth fighting, you French!"

"So we are," shouted a knight, the first and last who crossed that parapet; for, thrusting Hereward back with a blow of his sword-hilt, he staggered past him over the hoarding, and fell on his knees.

A dozen men were upon him; but he was up again and shouting —

"To me, men at arms! A Deda! A Deda!" But no man answered.

"Yield!" quoth Hereward.

Sir Deda answered by a blow on Hereward's helmet, which felled the Wake to his knees, and broke the sword into twenty splinters.

"Well hit!" said Hereward, as he rose. "Don't touch him, men! this is my quarrel now. Yield, sir! you have done enough for your honor. It is madness to throw away your life."

The knight looked round on the fierce ring of faces, in the midst of which he stood alone.

"To none but the Wake."

"The Wake am I."

"Ah," said the knight, "had I but hit a little harder!"

"You would have broke your sword into more splinters. My armor is enchanted. So yield like a reasonable and valiant man."

"What care I?" said the knight, stepping on to the earthwork, and sitting down quietly. "I vowed to St. Mary and King William that into Ely I would get this day, and in Ely I am; so I have done my work."

"And now you shall taste — as such a gallant knight deserves — the hospitality of Ely."

It was Torfrida who spoke.

"My husband's prisoners are mine; and I, when I find them such gallant knights as you are, have

no lighter chains for them than that which a lady's bower can afford."

Sir Deda was going to make an equally courteous answer, when over and above the shouts and curses of the combatants rose a yell so keen, so dreadful, as made all hurry forward to the rampart.

That which the Wake had foreseen was come at last. The bridge, strained more and more by its living burden and by the falling tide, had parted, — not at the Ely end, where the sliding of the sow took off the pressure, — but at the end nearest the camp. One sideway roll it gave, and then, turning over, engulfed in that foul stream the flower of Norman chivalry; leaving a line — a full quarter of a mile in length — of wretches drowning in the dark water, or, more hideous still, in the bottomless slime of peat and mud.

Thousands are said to have perished. Their armor and weapons were found at times, by delvers and dykers, for centuries after; are found at times unto this day, beneath the rich drained cornfields which now fill up that black half-mile; or in the bed of the narrow brook to which the Westwater, robbed of its streams by the Bedford Level, has dwindled down at last.

William, they say, struck his tents and departed forthwith, "groaning from deep grief of heart." Eastward he went, and encamped the remains of his army at Brandon, where he seems to have begun that castle, the ruins of which still exist in Weeting Park hard by. He put a line of sentinels along the Rech-dyke, which men now call the Devil's Ditch; and did his best to blockade the isle, as he could not storm it. And so ended the first battle of Aldreth.

CHAPTER XXIX

HOW SIR DEDA BROUGHT NEWS FROM ELY

A MONTH after the fight, there came into the camp at Brandon, riding on an ambling pad, himself fat and well-liking, none other than Sir Deda.

Boisterously he was received, as one alive from the dead; and questioned as to his adventures and sufferings.

"Adventures I have had, and strange ones; but as for sufferings—instead of fetter-galls, I bring back, as you see, a new suit of clothes; instead of an empty and starved stomach, a surfeit from good victuals and good liquor; and whereas I went into Ely on foot, I came out on a fast hackney."

So into William's tent he went; and there he told his tale.

"So, Deda, my friend?" quoth the Duke, in high good humor, for he loved Deda. "You seem to have been in good company?"

"Never in better, sire, save in your presence. Of the earls and knights in Ely, all I can say is, God's pity that they are rebels; for more gallant and courteous knights or more perfect warriors never saw I either in Normandy or at Constantinople, among the Varangers themselves."

"Eh? and what are the names of these gallants, for you have used your eyes and ears, of course?"

"Edwin and Morcar, the earls — two fine young lads."

"I know it. Go on;" and a shade passed over William's brow as he thought of his own falsehood, and of his fair daughter, weeping in vain for the fair bridegroom whom he had promised to her.

"Siward Barn, as they call him, the boy Orgar, and Thurkil Barn. Those are the knights. Egelwin, Bishop of Durham, is there too; and besides them all, and above them all, Hereward the Wake. The like of that knight I may have seen. His better saw I never."

"Sir fool!" said Earl Warrenne, who had not yet — small blame to him — forgotten his brother's death. "They have soused thy brains with their muddy ale, till thou knowest not friend from foe. What, hast thou to come hither praising up to the king's majesty such an outlawed villain as that, with whom no honest knight would keep company?"

"If you, Earl Warrenne, ever found Deda drunk or lying, it is more than the king here has done."

"Let him speak, earl," said William. "I have not an honester man in my camp; and he speaks for my information, not for yours."

"Then for yours will I speak, sir king. These men treated me knightly, and sent me away without ransom."

"They had an eye to their own profit, it seems," grumbled the earl.

"But force me they did to swear on the holy Gospels that I should tell your majesty the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. And I keep my oath," quoth Deda.

"Go on, then, without fear or favor. Are there any other men of note in the island?"

"No."

"Are they in want of provisions?"

"Look how they have fattened me."

"What do they complain of?"

"I will tell you, sir king. The monks, like many more, took fright at the coming over of our French men of God to set right all their filthy barbarous ways: and that is why they threw Ely open to the rebels."

"I will be even with the sots," quoth William.

"However they think that danger blown over just now; for they have a story among them, which, as my lord the king never heard before, he may as well hear now."

"Eh?"

"How your majesty should have sent across the sea a whole shipload of French monks."

"That have I, and will more, till I reduce these swine into something like obedience to his Holiness of Rome."

"Ah, but your majesty has not heard how one Bruman, a valiant English knight, was sailing on the sea and caught those monks. Whereon he tied a great sack to the ship's head, and cut the bottom out, and made every one of those monks get into that sack and so fall through into the sea; whereby he rid the monks of Ely of their rivals."

"Pish! why tell me such an old wives' fable, knight?"

"Because the monks believe that old wives' fable, and are stout-hearted and stiff-necked accordingly."

"The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church," said William's chaplain, a pupil and friend

of Lanfranc; "and if these men of Belial drowned every man of God in Normandy, ten would spring up in their places to convert this benighted and besotted land of Simonites and Balaamites, whose priests, like the brutes which perish, scruple not to defile themselves, and the service of the altar, with things which they impudently call their wives."

"We know that, good chaplain," quoth William, impatiently. He had enough of that language from Lanfranc himself; and, moreover, was thinking more of the Isle of Ely, than of the celibacy of the clergy.

"Well, Sir Deda?"

"So they have got together all their kin; for among these monks every one is kin to a thane, or knight, or even an earl: and there they are, brother by brother, cousin by cousin, knee to knee, and back to back, like a pack of wolves, and that in a hold which you will not enter yet awhile."

"Does my friend Deda doubt his duke's skill at last?"

"Sir duke — sir king I mean now, for king you are and deserve to be — I know what you can do. I remember how we took England at one blow on Senlac field; but see you here, sir king, how will you take an island with four such saints to guard it as St. Etheldreda, St. Withberga, St. Sexberga, and St. Ermenilda?"

"By promising the holy ladies," said William, with a smile, "to honor them better than ever did yet an English swine."

"Amen: but again, how will you take an island where four kings such as you (if the world would hold four such at once) could not stop one churl

from ploughing the land, or one birdcatcher from setting lime-twigs?"[1]

"And what if I cannot stop the birdcatchers? Do they expect to lime Frenchmen as easily as sparrows?"

"Sparrows! It is not sparrows that I have been fattening on this last month. I tell you, sire, I have seen wild-fowl alone in that island enough to feed them all the year round. I was there in the moulting time, and saw them take — one day one hundred, one two hundred; and once, as I am a belted knight, a thousand duck out of one single mere.[2] There is a wood there, with herons sprawling about the tree-tops — I did not think there were so many in the world; otters and weasels, ermines and pole-cats, for fur robes; and fish for Lent and Fridays in every puddle and leat — pike and perch, roach and eels, on every old wife's table; while the knights think scorn of anything worse than smelt and burbot."[3]

"Splendeur Dex!" quoth William, who, Norman-like, did not dislike a good dinner. "I must keep Lent in Ely before I die."

"Then you had best make peace with the burbot-eating knights, my lord."

[1] I have followed Deda's account of Ely and its folk, as given both in the Peterborough MSS. and in the "Liber Eliensis," almost word for word throughout.

[2] Ficedulæ (beccaficos, by which the good monk means wheatears and such small birds), coots, divers, "watercrows," cranes, and ducks.

[3] "Innumerable eels, great water-wolves and pickerel, perches, roaches, burbots, and murænas, which we call water-serpents." (These last seem to be mythical, unless the silurus glanis still lingered, as it may have done, in the waters of the Ouse). "Sometimes also isicii" (smelts, I presume, as they are still abundant in the Ouse) "and the royal fish rumbus" (turbot): surely a misnomer for the sturgeon.

"But have they flesh-meat?"

"The island is half of it a garden — richer land, they say, is none in these realms, and I believe it: but, besides that, there is a deer-park there with a thousand head in it, red and fallow, beside hares; and plenty of swine and goats[1] in woods, and sheep, and cattle; and if they fail there are plenty more to be got, they know where."

"They know where? Do you, sir knight?" asked William, keenly.

"Out of every little island in their fens, for forty miles on end. There are the herds fattening themselves on the richest pastures in the land, and no man needing to herd them, for they are all safe among dykes and meres."

"I will make my boats sweep their fens clear of every head ——"

"Take care, my lord king, lest never a boat come back from that errand. With their narrow flat-bottomed punts, cut out of a single log, and their leaping-poles, wherewith they fly over dykes of thirty feet in width, — they can ambuscade in those reed-beds and alder-beds, kill whom they will, and then flee away through the marsh, like so many horse-flies. And if not, one trick have they left, which they never try save when driven into a corner: but from that may all saints save us!"

"What then?"

"Firing the reeds."

"And destroying their own cover?"

"True: therefore they will only do it in despair."

"Then to despair will I drive them, and try

[1] That the goat as well as the stag was common in the fens, the horns found in peat and gravel testify.

their worst. So these monks are as stout rebels as the earls?"

"I only say what I saw. At the hall-table there dined each day maybe some fifty belted knights, with every one a monk next to him; and at the high table the abbot, and the earls, and Hereward and his lady. And behind each knight, and each monk likewise, hung against the wall, lance and shield, helmet and hauberk, sword and axe."

"To monk as well as knight?"

"As I am a knight myself; and were as well used, too, for aught I saw. The monks took turns with the knights as sentries, and as foragers likewise; and the knights themselves told me openly, the monks were as good men as they."

"As wicked, you mean," groaned the chaplain. "Oh, accursed and bloodthirsty race, why does not the earth open and swallow you, with Korah, Dathan, and Abiram?"

"They would not care," quoth Deda. "They are born and bred in the bottomless pit already. They would jump over, or flounder out, as they do to their own bogs every day."

"You speak irreverently, my friend," quoth William.

"Ask those who are in camp, and not me. As for whither they went, or how, the English were not likely to tell me. All that I know is, that I saw fresh cattle come in every few days, and fresh farms burnt, too, on the Norfolk side. There were farms burning only last night, between here and Cambridge. Ask your sentinels on the Rechdyke how that came about."[1]

[1] See § 23 of the "De Gestis Herewardi," presumed to be by Richard of Ely, "And while he had hardly finished his speech,"

"I can answer that," quoth a voice from the other end of the tent. "I was on the Rech-dyke last night, close down to the fen — worse luck and shame for me."

"Answer, then!" quoth William, with one of his fiercest oaths, glad to have some one on whom he could turn his rage and disappointment.

"There came seven men in a boat up from Ely yestereven, and five of them were monks; they came up from Burwell fen, and plundered and burnt Burwell town."

"And where were all you mighty men of war?"

"Ten of ours ran down to stop them, with Richard, Viscount Osbert's nephew, at their head. The villains came at a foot's pace up the Rech-dyke, and attacked them at lance-point; and before we could get to them ——"

"Thy men had run, of course."

"They were every one dead or wounded, save Richard; and he was fighting single-handed with an Englishman, while the other six stood around, and looked on."

"Then they fought fairly?" said William.

"As fairly, to do them justice, as if they had been Frenchmen, and not English churls. As we came down along the dyke, a little man of them steps between the two, and strikes up their swords as if they had been two reeds. 'Come!' cries he, 'enough of this. You are two stout knights well matched, and you can fight out this any other day;' and away he and his men go down the dyke end to the water."

etc. Those who love to investigate the growth of myths, may profitably amuse themselves by comparing that account with § 106 of the "Liber Eliensis." The omissions will be as instructive as the assertions.

"Leaving Richard safe?"

"Wounded a little — but safe enough."

"And then?"

"We followed them to the boat as hard as we could; killed one of their boatmen with a javelin, and caught another."

"Knightly done!" and William swore an awful oath, "and worthy of valiant Frenchmen. These English set you the example of chivalry by letting your comrade fight his own battle fairly, instead of setting on him all together; and you repay them by hunting them down with darts, because you dare not go within sword's-stroke of better men than yourselves. Go. I am ashamed of you. No, stay. Where is your prisoner? For, Splendeur Dex, I will send him back safe and sound in return for Deda, to tell the knights of Ely that if they know so well the courtesies of war, William of Rouen does too."

"The prisoner, sire," quoth the knight, trembling, "is — is ——"

"You have not murdered him?"

"Heaven forbid! but ——"

"He broke his bonds and escaped?"

"Gnawed them through, sire, as we supposed, and escaped through the mire in the dark, after the fashion of these accursed frogs of Girvians."

"But did he tell you naught ere he bade you good morning?"

"He told us the names of all the seven. He that beat down the swords was Hereward himself."

"I thought as much. When shall I have that fellow at my side?"

"He that fought Richard was one Wenoch."

"I have heard of him."

"He that we took was Azer the Hardy, a monk of Nicole — Licole. And the rest were Turstan the Younger; one Siward, another monk; Leofric the Deacon, Hereward's minstrel; and Boter, the traitor monk of St. Edmunds."

"And if I catch them," quoth William, "I will make an abbot of every one of them."

"Sire?" quoth the chaplain, in a deprecating tone.

CHAPTER XXX

HOW HEREWARD PLAYED THE POTTER; AND HOW HE CHEATED THE KING

THEY of Ely were now much straitened, being shut in both by land and water; and what was to be done, either by themselves or by the king, they knew not. Would William simply starve them; or at least inflict on them so perpetual a Lent — for of fish there could be no lack, even if they ate or drove away all the fowl — as would tame down their proud spirits; which a diet of fish and vegetables, from some ludicrous theory of monastic physicians, was supposed to do?[1] Or was he gathering vast armies, from they knew not whence, to try, once and for all, another assault on the island — it might be from several points at once?

They must send out a spy, and find out news from the outer world, if news were to be gotten. But who would go?

So asked the bishop, and the abbot, and the earls, in council in the abbot's lodging.

Torfrida was among them. She was always among them now. She was their Alruna-wife, their wise woman, whose counsels all received as more than human.

[1] The Cornish — the stoutest, tallest, and most prolific race of the South — live on hardly anything else but fish and vegetables.

"I will go," said she, rising up like a goddess on Olympus. "I will cut off my hair, and put on boy's clothes, and smirch myself brown with walnut-leaves; and I will go. I can talk their French tongue. I know their French ways; and as for a story to cover my journey and my doings, trust a woman's wit to invent that."

They looked at her, with delight in her courage, but with doubt.

"If William's French grooms got hold of you, Torfrida, it would not be a little walnut-brown which would hide you," said Hereward. "But it is like you to offer, — worthy of you, who have no peer."

"That she has not," quoth churchmen and soldiers alike.

"Nevertheless — to send you would be to send the Wake's praying half; and that would be bad religion. The Wake's fighting half is going, while you pray here as well as watch."

"Uncle, uncle!" said the young earls, "send Winter, Geri, Leofwin Prat, any of your good men: but not yourself. If we lose you, we lose our head and our king."

And all begged Hereward to let any man go, rather than himself.

"I am going, lords and knights; and what Hereward says he does. It is one day to Brandon. It may be two days back; for if I miscarry — as I most likely shall — I must come home round about. On the fourth day, you shall hear of me or from me. Come with me, Torfrida."

And he strode out.

He cropped his golden locks, he cropped his golden beard; and Torfrida wept, as she cropped

them, half with fear for him, half for sorrow over his shorn glories.

"I am no Samson, my lady; my strength lieth not in my locks. Now for some rascal's clothes — as little dirty as you can get me, for fear of company."

And Hereward put on filthy garments; and taking mare Swallow with him, got into a barge and went across the river to Soham.

He could not go down the Great Ouse, and up the Little Ouse, which was his easiest way, for the French held all the river below the isle; and, besides, to have come straight from Ely might cause suspicion. So he went down to Fordham, and crossed the Lark at Mildenhall; and just before he got to Mildenhall, he met a potter carrying pots upon a pony.

"Halt, my stout churl," quoth he, "and put thy pots on my mare's back."

"The man who wants them must fight for them," quoth that stout churl, raising a heavy staff.

"Then here is he that will," quoth Hereward; and, jumping off his mare, he twisted the staff out of the potter's hands, and knocked him down therewith.

"That will teach thee to know an Englishman when thou seest him."

"I have met my master," quoth the churl, rubbing his head. "But dog does not eat dog; and it is hard to be robbed by an Englishman, after being robbed a dozen times by the French."

"I will not rob thee. There is a silver penny for thy pots and thy coat — for that I must have likewise. And if thou tellest to mortal man aught about this, I will find those who will cut thee up for dogs' meat; but if not, then turn thy horse's

head and ride back to Ely, if thou canst cross the water, and say what has befallen thee; and thou wilt find there an abbot who will give thee another penny for thy news."

So Hereward took the pots, and the potter's clay-greased coat, and went on through Mildenhall, "crying," saith the chronicler, "after the manner of potters, in the English tongue, 'Pots! pots! good pots and pans!'"

But when he got through Mildenhall, and well into the rabbit-warrens, he gave mare Swallow a kick, and went over the heath so fast northward, that his pots danced such a dance as broke half of them before he got to Brandon.

"Never mind," quoth he, "they will think that I have sold them." And when he neared Brandon he pulled up, sorted his pots, kept the whole ones, threw the shreds at the rabbits, and walked on into Brandon solemnly, leading the mare, and crying, "Pots!"

So "semper marcida et deformis aspectu" — lean and ill-looking — was that famous mare, says the chronicler, that no one would suspect her splendid powers, or take her for anything but a potter's nag, when she was caparisoned in proper character. Hereward felt thoroughly at home in his part; as able to play the Englishman which he was by rearing, as the Frenchman which he was by education. He was full of heart and happy. He enjoyed the keen fresh air of the warrens; he enjoyed the ramble out of the isle, in which he had been cooped up so long; he enjoyed the jest of the thing — disguise, stratagem, adventure, danger. And so did the English, who adored him. None of the Wake's crafty deeds is told so carefully and

lovingly; and none, doubt it not, was so often sung in after years by farm-house hearths, or in the outlaws' lodge, as this. Robin Hood himself may have trolled out many a time, in doggerel strain, how Hereward played the potter.

And he came to Brandon, to the "king's court," from which William could command the streams of Wissey and Little Ouse, with all their fens; and saw with a curse the new buildings of Weeting castle — like the rest, of which Sir F. Palgrave eloquently says — "New, and strong and cruel in their strength — how the Englishman must have loathed the damp smell of the fresh mortar, and the sight of the heaps of rubble, and the chippings of the stone, and the blurring of the lime upon the greensward; and how hopeless he must have felt when the great gates opened, and the wains were drawn in, heavily laden with the salted beeves, and the sacks of corn and meal furnished by the royal demesnes, the manors which had belonged to Edward the Confessor, now the spoil of the stranger; and when he looked into the castle court, thronged by the soldiers in bright mail, and heard the carpenters working upon the ordnance, — every blow and stroke, even of the hammer or mallet, speaking the language of defiance."

These things the Wake saw; and felt, like others, hopeless for the moment. And there rang in his ears his own message to William: "When thou art king of all England, I will put my hands between thine, and be thy man."

"He is not king of all England yet!" thought he again; and drew himself up so proudly that one passing by jeered him —

"There goes a bold swaggerer enough, to be

selling pots abroad." The Wake slooched his shoulders, and looked as mean a churl as ever. Next he cast about for a night's lodging, for it was dark.

Outside the town was a wretched cabin of mud and turf — such a one as Irish folk live in to this day; and Hereward said to himself, "This is bad enough to be good enough for me."

So he knocked at the door; and knocked till it was opened and a hideous old crone put out her head.

"Who wants to see me at this time of night?"

"Any one would who had heard how beautiful you are. Do you want any pots?"

"Pots? What have I to do with pots, thou saucy fellow? I thought it was some one wanting a charm." And she shut the door.

"A charm?" thought Hereward. "Maybe she can tell me news, if she be a witch. They are shrewd souls, these witches, and know more than they tell. And if I can get any news, I care not if Satan brings it in person."

So he knocked again, till the old woman looked out once more, and bade him angrily be off.

"But I am belated here, good dame, and afraid of the French. And I will give thee the best bit of clay on my mare's back — pot — pan — panshin — crock — jug, or what thou wilt, for a night's lodging."

"Have you any little jars — jars no longer than my hand?" asked she; for she used them in her trade, and had broken one of late: but to pay for one she had neither money nor mind. So she agreed to let Hereward sleep there, for the value of two jars. — "But what of that ugly brute of a horse of thine?"

"She will do well enough in the turf-shed."

"Then thou must pay with a panshin."

"Ugh!" groaned Hereward; "thou drivest a hard bargain, for an Englishwoman, with a poor Englishman."

"How knowest thou that I am English?"

"So much the better if thou art not," thought Hereward; and bargained with her for a panshin against a lodging for the horse in the turf-house, and a bottle of bad hay.

Then he went in, bringing his panniers with him with ostentatious care.

"Thou canst sleep there on the rushes. I have naught to give thee to eat."

"Naught needs naught," said Hereward; threw himself down on a bundle of rush, and in a few minutes snored loudly.

But he was never less asleep. He looked round the whole place and he listened to every word.

The devil, as usual, was a bad paymaster; for the witch's cabin seemed only somewhat more miserable than that of other old women. The floor was mud, the rafters unceiled; the stars shone through the turf roof. The only hint of her trade was a hanging shelf, on which stood five or six little earthen jars, and a few packets of leaves. A parchment, scrawled with characters which the owner herself probably did not understand, hung against the cob wall; and a human skull — probably used only to frighten her patients — dangled from the roof-tree.

But in a corner, stuck against the wall, was something which chilled Hereward's blood a little; a dried human hand, which he knew must have been stolen off the gallows, gripping in its fleshless

fingers a candle, which he knew was made of human fat. That candle, he knew, duly lighted and carried, would enable the witch to walk unseen into any house on earth, yea, through the court of King William himself, while it drowned all men in preternatural slumber.

Hereward was very much frightened. He believed devoutly in the powers of a witch.

So he trembled on his rushes, and wished himself safe through that adventure, without being turned into a hare or a wolf.

"I would sooner be a wolf than a hare, of course: but — who comes here?"

And to the first old crone, who sat winking her bleared eyes, and warming her bleared hands over a little heap of peat in the middle of the cabin, entered another crone, if possible uglier.

"Two of them! If I am not roasted and eaten this night, I am a lucky man."

And Hereward crossed himself devoutly, and invoked St. Etheldreda of Ely, St. Guthlac of Crowland, St. Felix of Ramsey — to which last saint, he recollected, he had been somewhat remiss: but, above all, St. Peter of Peterborough, whose treasures he had given to the Danes. And he argued stoutly with St. Peter and with his own conscience, that the means sanctify the end, and that he had done it all for the best.

"If thou wilt help me out of this strait, and the rest, blessed apostle, I will give thee — I will go to Constantinople but what I will win it — a golden table, twice as fine as those villains carried off; and one of the Bourne manors — Witham — or Toft — or Mainthorpe — whichever pleases thee best, in full fee; and a — and a ——"

But while Hereward was casting in his mind what gewgaw further might suffice to appease the apostle, he was recalled to business and common sense by hearing the two old hags talk to each other in French.

His heart leaped for joy, and he forgot St. Peter utterly.

"Well, how have you sped? Have you seen the king?"

"No; but Ivo Taillebois. Eh? Who the foul fiend have you lying there?"

"Only an English brute. He cannot understand us. Talk on: only don't wake the hog. Have you got the gold?"

"Never mind."

Then there was a grumbling and a quarrelling, from which Hereward understood that the gold was to be shared between them.

"But it is a bit of a chain. To cut it will spoil it."

The other insisted; and he heard them chop the gold chain in two.

"And is this all?"

"I had work enough to get that. He said, no play no pay; and he would give it me after the isle was taken. But I told him my spirit was a Jewish spirit, that used to serve Solomon the Wise; and he would not serve me, much less come over the sea from Normandy, unless he smelt gold; for he loved it like any Jew."

"And what did you tell him then?"

"That the king must go back to Aldreth again; for only from thence would he take the isle; for — and that was true enough — I dreamt I saw all the water of Aldreth full of wolves, clambering over into the island on each other's backs."

"That means that some of them will be drowned."

"Let them drown. I left him to find out that part of the dream himself. Then I told him how he must make another causeway, bigger and stronger than the last, and a tower on which I could stand and curse the English. And I promised him to bring a storm right in the faces of the English, so that they could neither fight nor see."

"But if the storm does not come?"

"It will come. I know the signs of the sky — who better? — and the weather will break up in a week. Therefore I told him he must begin his works at once, before the rain came on; and that we would go and ask the guardian of the well [1] to tell us the fortunate day for attacking."

"That is my business," said the other; "and my spirit likes the smell of gold as well as yours. Little you would have got from me, if you had not given me half the chain."

Then the two rose.

"Let us see whether the English hog is asleep."

One of them came and listened to Hereward's breathing, and put her hand upon his chest. His hair stood on end; a cold sweat came over him. But he snored more loudly than ever.

The two old crones went out satisfied. Then Hereward rose, and glided after them.

They went down a meadow to a little well, which Hereward had marked as he rode thither hung round with bits of rag and flowers, as similar "holy wells" are decorated in Ireland to this day.

He hid behind a hedge, and watched them stoop-

[1] "Custodem fontium," the guardian spirit.

ing over the well, mumbling he knew not what of cantrips.

Then there was a silence, and a tinkling sound as of water.

"Once — twice — thrice," counted the witches. Nine times he counted the tinkling sound.

"The ninth day — the ninth day, and the king shall take Ely," said one in a cracked scream, rising and shaking her fist towards the isle.

Hereward was more than half-minded to have put his dagger — the only weapon which he had — into the two old beldames. But the fear of an outcry kept him still. He had found out already so much, that he was determined to find out more. So to-morrow he would go up to the court itself, and take what luck sent.

He slipped back to the cabin, and lay down again; and as soon as he had seen the two old crones safe asleep, fell asleep himself, and was so tired that he laid till the sun was high.

"Get up!" screamed the old dame at last, kicking him, "or I shall make you give me another crock for a double night's rest."

He paid his lodging, put the panniers on the mare, and went on crying pots.

When he came to the outer gateway of the court, he tied up the mare, and carried the crockery in on his own back, boldly. The scullions saw him; and called him into the kitchen, to see his crockery, without the least intention of paying for what they took.

A man of rank belonging to the court came in, and stared fixedly at Hereward.

"You are mightily like that villain Hereward, man," quoth he.

"Anon?" asked Hereward, looking as stupid as he could.

"If it were not for his brown face and his short hair, he is as like that fellow as a churl can be to a knight."

"Bring him into the hall," quoth another; "and let us see if any man knows him."

Into the great hall he was brought, and stared at by knights and squires. He bent his knees, rounded his shoulders, and made himself look as mean as he could.

Ivo Taillebois and Earl Warrenne came down and had a look at him.

"Hereward?" said Ivo. "I will warrant that little slouching cur is not he. Hereward must be half as big again, if it be true that he can kill a man with one blow of his fist."

"You may try the truth of that for yourself some day," thought Hereward.

"Does any one here talk English? Let us question the fellow," said Earl Warrenne.

"Hereward? Hereward? Who wants to know about that villain?" answered the potter, as soon as he was asked in English. "Would to heaven he were here, and I could see some of you noble knights and earls paying him for me; for I owe him more than ever I shall pay myself."

"What does he mean?"

"He came out of the isle ten days ago, nigh on to evening, and drove off a cow of mine and four sheep, which was all my living, noble knights, save these pots."

"And where is he since?"

"In the isle, my lords, well-nigh starved, and his folk falling away from him daily, from hunger and

ague-fits. I doubt if there be a hundred sound men left in Ely."

"Have you been in thither, then, villain?"

"Heaven forbid! I in Ely? I in the wolf's den? If I went in with naught but my skin, they would have it off me before I got out again. Ah, if your lordships would but come down, and make an end of him once for all; for he is a great tyrant, and terrible, and devours us poor folk like so many mites in his cheese."

"Take this babbler into the kitchen and feed him," quoth Earl Warrenne; and so the colloquy ended.

Into the kitchen again the potter went. The king's luncheon was preparing; so he listened to the chatter; and picked up this at least which was valuable to him: that the witches' story was true; that a great attack would be made from Aldreth; that boats had been ordered up the river to Cotinglade,[1] and pioneers and entrenching tools were to be sent on that day to the old causeway.

But soon he had to take care of himself. Earl Warrenne's commands to feed him were construed by the cook-boys and scullions into a command to make him drunk likewise. To make a laughing-stock of an Englishman was too tempting a jest to be resisted; and Hereward was drenched (says the chronicler) with wine and beer, and sorely baited and badgered. At last one rascal hit upon a notable plan.

"Pluck out the English hog's hair and beard, and put him blindfold in the midst of his pots, and see what a smash we shall have."

[1] Seemingly a lade, leat, or canal, through Cottenham Fen to the Westwater; probably a Roman work, now obliterated.

Hereward pretended not to understand the words, which were spoken in French; but when they were interpreted to him, he grew somewhat red about the ears.

Submit he would not. But if he defended himself, and made an uproar in the king's court, he might very likely find himself riding Odin's horse before the hour was out. However, happily for him, the wine and beer had made him stout of heart, and when one fellow laid hold of his beard, he resisted sturdily.

The man struck him, and that hard. Hereward, hot of temper, and careless of life, struck him again, right under the ear.

The fellow dropped for dead.

Up leaped cook-boys, scullions, "lécheurs" (who hung about the kitchen to "lécher," lick the platters), and all the foul-mouthed rascality of a great mediæval household, and attacked Hereward "cum furcis et tridentibus," with forks and flesh-hooks.

Then was Hereward aware of a great broach, or spit, before the fire; and recollecting how he had used such an one as a boy against the monks of Peterborough, was minded to use it against the cooks of Brandon; which he did so heartily that in a few moments he had killed one, and driven the others backward in a heap.

But his case was hopeless. He was soon overpowered by numbers from outside, and dragged into the hall, to receive judgment for the mortal crime of slaying a man within the precincts of the court.

He kept up heart. He knew that the king was there; he knew that he should most likely get jus-

tice from the king. If not, he could but discover himself, and so save his life, for that William would kill him willingly, he did not believe.

So he went in boldly and willingly, and up the hall, where, on the dais, stood William the Norman.

William had finished his luncheon, and was standing at the board-side. A page held water in a silver basin, in which he was washing his hands. Two more knelt, and laced his long boots; for he was, as always, going a-hunting.

Then Hereward looked at the face of the great man, and felt at once that it was the face of the greatest man whom he had ever met.

"I am not that man's match," said he to himself. "Perhaps it will all end in being his man, and he my master."

"Silence, knaves!" said William, "and speak one of you at a time. How came this?"

"A likely story, forsooth!" said he, when he had heard. "A poor English potter comes into my court, and murders my men under my very eyes for mere sport. I do not believe you, rascals! You, churl," and he spoke through an English interpreter, "tell me your tale, and justice you shall have or take, as you deserve. I am the King of England, man, and I know your tongue, though I speak it not yet, more pity."

Hereward fell on his knees.

"If you are indeed my lord the king, then I am safe; for there is justice in you: at least so all men say." And he told his tale manfully.

"Splendeur Dex! but this is a far likelier story, and I believe it. Hark you, you ruffians! Here am I, trying to conciliate these English by justice and

mercy, whenever they will let me; and here are you outraging them, and driving them mad and desperate, just that you may get a handle against them, and thus rob the poor wretches and drive them into the forest. From the lowest to the highest — from Ivo Taillebois there, down to you cook-boys — you are all at the same game. And I will stop it! The next time I hear of outrage to unarmed man or harmless woman, I will hang that culprit, were he Odo my brother himself."

This excellent speech was enforced with oaths so strange and terrible that Ivo Taillebois shook in his boots; and the chaplain prayed fervently that the roof might not fall in on their heads.

"Thou smilest, man?" said William, quickly, to the kneeling Hereward. "So thou understandest French?"

"A few words only, most gracious king, which we potters pick up, wandering everywhere with our wares," said Hereward, speaking in French; for so keen was William's eye, that he thought it safer to play no tricks with him.

Nevertheless, he made his French so execrable, that the very scullions grinned, in spite of their fear.

"Look you," said William, "you are no common churl; you have fought too well for that. Let me see your arm."

Hereward drew up his sleeve.

"Potters do not carry sword-scars like those; neither are they tattooed like English thanes. Hold up thy head, man, and let us see thy throat."

Hereward, who had carefully hung down his head to prevent his throat-patterns being seen, was forced to lift it up.

"Aha! So I expected. There is fair ladies' work there. Is not this he who was said to be so like Hereward? Very good. Put him in ward till I come back from hunting. But do him no harm. For"—and William fixed on Hereward eyes of the most intense intelligence—"were he Hereward himself, I should be right glad to see Hereward safe and sound; my man at last, and earl of all between Humber and the fens."

But Hereward did not rise at the bait. With a face of stupid and ludicrous terror, he made reply in broken French.

"Have mercy, mercy, lord king! Make not that fiend earl over us. Even Ivo Taillebois there would be better than he. Send him to be earl over the imps in hell, or over the wild Welsh who are worse still; but not over us, good lord king, whom he hath polled and peeled till we are——"

"Silence!" said William, laughing, as did all round him. "Thou art a cunning rogue enough, whoever thou art. Go into limbo, and behave thyself till I come back."

"All saints send your grace good sport, and thereby me a good deliverance," quoth Hereward, who knew that his fate might depend on the temper in which William returned. So he was thrust into an outhouse, and there locked up.

He sat on an empty barrel, meditating on the chances of his submitting to the king after all, when the door opened, and in strode one with a drawn sword in one hand, and a pair of leg-shackles in the other.

"Hold out thy shins, fellow! Thou art not going to sit at thine ease there like an abbot, after

killing one of us grooms, and bringing the rest of us into disgrace. Hold out thy legs, I say!"

"Nothing easier," quoth Hereward, cheerfully, and held out a leg. But when the man stooped to put on the fetters, he received a kick which sent him staggering.

After which he recollected very little, at least in this world. For Hereward cut off his head with his own sword.

After which (says the chronicler) he broke away out of the house, and over garden walls and palings, hiding and running, till he got to the front gate, and leaped upon mare Swallow.

And none saw him, save one unlucky groom-boy, who stood yelling and cursing in front of the mare's head, and went to seize her bridle.

Whereon, between the imminent danger and the bad language, Hereward's blood rose, and he smote that unlucky groom-boy; but whether he slew him or not, the chronicler had rather not say.

Then he shook up mare Swallow, and with one great shout of "A Wake! A Wake!" rode for his life, with knights and squires (for the hue and cry was raised) galloping at her heels.

Who then were astonished but those knights, as they saw the ugly potter's garron gaining on them, length after length, till she and her rider had left them far behind?

Who then was proud but Hereward, as the mare tucked her great thighs under her, and swept on over heath and rabbit-burrow, over rush and fen, sound ground and rotten all alike to that enormous stride, to that keen bright eye which foresaw every footfall, to that raking shoulder which picked her up again at every stagger?

Hereward laid the bridle on her neck, and let her go. Fall she could not, and tire she could not; and he half wished she might go on forever. Where could a man be better than on a good horse, with all the cares of this life blown away out of his brains by the keen air which rushed round his temples? And he galloped on, as cheery as a boy, shouting at the rabbits as they scuttled from under his feet, and laughing at the dotterel as they postured and anticked on the mole-hills.

But when he got through Mildenhall, he began to think how he should get home to Ely.

The hue and cry would be out against him. The ports and ferries to the east of the isle as far south as Cambridge would be guarded; and all the more surely, on account of the approaching attack. True, he knew many a path and ford which the French could not know; but he feared to trust himself in the labyrinth of fens and meres, with a mob of pursuers at his heels. A single mistake might pound him among morasses, and force him, even if he escaped himself through the reeds, to leave the mare behind. And to do that was shame and loss intolerable. No. Mare Swallow, for her own sake, must do a deed that day.

He would go south by the Roman roads. He would go right round the fens; round Cambridge itself; into the western forests. There he could lie hid till some friend at Somersham or Earith should ferry him over to the western side of the isle. The distance was great, well-nigh fifty miles; but the land was light and sound, and the going safe and good. It must be done. It should be done.

He gathered the mare together, as he rose the slope of Kennet Heath. She was going steadily and soundly, breathing like a sleeping child. His pursuers were two miles behind; black dots among the barrows on Barton hill. He had time to rest her; and trotted on steadily, keeping to the uplands, and the highroad, from whence he could see far and wide over the land.

On by Newmarket heath — nameless and desert then — over smooth chalk turf; through glades of fern and thorn; past barrows where slept the heroes of old times, Briton, Roman, Saxon, Dane; forefathers of his own, perhaps, among them. Ay — that was the place for a hero to sleep in. Not choked in a minster charnel-house, amid green damp and droning monks; but out under the free sky, with his weapons round him, his horse, his dog, the antlers of his game; where he might come up out of his barrow on moonlight nights, and stare at the flying clouds, and scent the rushing breeze. Ah, that he could be buried there: but then Torfrida — he should like to lie by her.

He was at the Rech-dyke now, and warily he looked eastward, as he led the mare up the steep bank, for French scouts between him and the fens; but none were within sight.

He paused upon the top of that great earthwork. Dangerous as it was to stop in that exposed height, making himself a beacon against the sky, he could not but look down, and back, at all which remained of free English soil.

He looked down over Swaffham, Quy, and Waterbeach, and the rest of the tree-embowered hamlets which fringed the fen, green knolls on the shore of a boundless sea of pale-blue mist; and

above that sea, to the far north, a line of darker blue, which was the sacred isle. As the sun sank lower, higher rose the mist; and the isle grew more and more faint, vaporous, dreamy, as fen-distances are wont to be. Was it not about to fade away in reality; to become a vapor, and a dream, and leave him alone, and free? Earls, knights, housecarles, monks, seemed all becoming phantoms, fading with their fading cause. Was it worth while to fight, to die, for them, for anything? What was William to him? What was England? Why play out the lost game to the last? Why not leave all behind, and ride down south — to the sea — the free sea, and the wild joys of the Viking's life? And he led the mare down the Rech-dyke, and up again on to the down, faltering, stopping, his head sunken on his breast, his heart sunken within.

But Torfrida — Torfrida and the little girl. They at least were not phantoms. They could not vanish, could not even die — to him. His they were forever. What fiend had been putting boy's dreams into his head?

And he sprang hastily into the saddle, as one that flees from a temptation. "Home, mare! Home to prison again! We have been out far too long, old lass! too long."

He held on over the Fleam-dyke: but he feared to turn downwards into the Cambridge flats, and kept his vantage-ground upon the downs; till, on the top of the Gogmagog, he struck the old Roman road, which men call "Wort's Causeway" at this day. Down that he turned, short to the right, toward the green meadows, and the long line of mighty elms, and the little village which clustered,

unconscious of its coming glories, beneath the new French keep, beside the Roman bridge.

The setting sun gilded the white flints of the keep; and Hereward looked on them with a curse. But it gilded, too, the tree tops of the great forest beyond; and Hereward uttered something like a prayer to St. Etheldreda and her ladies three. For if he could but reach that forest he was safe.

The Wake was, of course, too wise to go through Cambridge street, under the eyes of the French garrison. But he saw that the Roman road led straight to a hamlet some mile above the town; and at the road end, he guessed, there must be either a bridge or a ford. There he could cross the Cam. And he rode slowly downward, longing for it to grow dark, and saving the mare, in case she should be needed for a sudden rush.

And a rush was soon needed. For on the hill behind him he saw armor glitter in the red light; and a brace of knights. They paused for a moment, and then espied him. One galloped down the road toward him; the other spurred to the right, straight for Cambridge.

"I shall have the whole pack of wolves out and on me, in half an hour," thought Hereward; and struck spurs into the mare.

Into the ford — by Chaucer's after-famous mill — he dashed, making more splash than ever did geese in Shelford Fen; and out again, and on to the clay wold, and away for Coton and Madingley rise, and the black wall of oak and ash and elm.

And as he entered the forest at Madingley, he rose in his stirrups, with a shout of "A Wake! A Wake!" which was heard, for aught he cared, in

Cambridge castle; and then rode on leisurely toward the Draytons, and the ferry over the Ouse at Holywell; for well he knew that they who could not catch the Wake in the field, were still less like to catch him in the wood.

And so through the forest, by a clear moonlight (says the chronicler), he came in the early morning to the Isle Somersham, which was then all deep wood (as the names of Woodhurst and Somersham Parks still testify), and was ferried over at Earith by one of his many friends into the Isle of Ely.

And of all those knights that followed him, none ever saw or heard sign of him, save one; and his horse came to a standstill in "the aforesaid wood," and he rolled off and lay breathless under a tree, looking up at his horse's heaving flanks and wagging tail, and wondering how he should get out of that place before the English found him and made an end of him.

Then there came up to him a ragged churl, and asked him who he was, and offered to help him.

"For the sake of God and courtesy," quoth he, his French pride being well-nigh beat out of him, "if thou hast seen or heard anything of Hereward the Wake, good fellow, tell me, and I will repay thee well."

"As thou hast asked me for the sake of God and of courtesy, sir knight, I will tell thee. I am the Wake. And in token thereof, thou shalt give me thy lance and sword, and take instead this sword which I carried off from the king's court at Brandon; and promise me, on the faith of a knight, to bear it back to King William, and tell him that Hereward and he have met at last, and

that he had best beware of the day when they shall meet again."

So that knight, not having recovered his wind, was fain to submit, and go home a sadder and a wiser man. And King William laughed a royal laugh, and commanded his knights that they should in no wise harm the Wake, but take him alive, and bring him in, and they should have great rewards.

Which seemed to them more easily said than done.

CHAPTER XXXI

HOW THEY FOUGHT AGAIN AT ALDRETH

HEREWARD came back in fear and trembling, after all. He believed in the magic powers of the witch of Brandon; and he asked Torfrida, in his simplicity, whether she was not cunning enough to defeat her spells by counter spells.

Torfrida smiled and shook her head.

"My knight, I have long since given up such vanities. Let us not fight evil with evil, but rather with good. Better are prayers than charms; for the former are heard in heaven above, and the latter only in the pit below. Let me and all the women of Ely go rather in procession to St. Etheldreda's well, there above the fort at Aldreth, and pray St. Etheldreda to be with us when the day shall come; and defend her own isle, and the honor of us women who have taken refuge in her holy arms."

So all the women of Ely walked out barefoot to St. Etheldreda's well, with Torfrida at their head, clothed in sackcloth, and with fetters on her wrists and waist and ankles; which she vowed, after the strange, sudden, earnest fashion of those times, never to take off again till she saw the French host flee from Aldreth before the face of St. Ethel-

dreda. So they prayed, while Hereward and his men worked at the forts below. And when they came back, and Torfrida was washing her feet, sore and bleeding from her pilgrimage, Hereward came in.

"You have murdered your poor soft feet, and taken nothing thereby, I fear."

"I have. If I had walked on sharp razors all the way, I would have done it gladly, to know what I know now. As I prayed I looked out over the fen; and St. Etheldreda put a thought into my heart. But it is so terrible a one, that I fear to tell it to you. And yet it seems our only chance."

Hereward threw himself at her feet, and prayed her to tell. At last she spoke, as one half afraid of her own words:

"Will the reeds burn, Hereward?"

Hereward kissed her feet again and again, calling her his prophetess, his savior.

"Burn! yes, like tinder, in this March wind, if the drought only holds. Pray that the drought may hold, Torfrida."

"There, there, say no more. How hard-hearted war makes even us women! There, help me to take off this rough sackcloth, and dress myself again."

Meanwhile William had moved his army again to Cambridge, and on to Willingham-field, and there he began to throw up those "globos and montanas," of which Leofric's paraphraser talks, but of which now no trace remains. Then he began to rebuild his causeway, broader and stronger; and commanded all the fishermen of the Ouse to bring their boats to Cotinglade, and ferry over his materials. "Among whom came Here-

ward in a very narrow canoe, with head and beard shaven lest he should be known, and worked diligently among the rest. But the sun did not set that day without mischief; for before Hereward went off, he finished his work by setting the whole on fire, so that it was all burnt, and some of the French killed and drowned."

And so the Wake went on, with stratagems and ambushes, till "after seven days' continual fighting, they had hardly done one day's work; save four globos of wood, in which they intended to put their artillery. But on the eighth day they determined to attack the isle, putting in the midst of them that pythoness woman on a high place, where she might be safe freely to exercise her art."

It was not Hereward alone who had entreated Torfrida to exercise her magic art in their behalf. But she steadily refused; and made good Abbot Thurstan support her refusal by a strict declaration, that he would have no fiends' games played in Ely, as long as he was abbot alive on land.

Torfrida, meanwhile, grew utterly wild. Her conscience smote her, in spite of her belief that St. Etheldreda had inspired her, at the terrible resource which she had hinted to her husband, and which she knew well he would carry out with terrible success. Pictures of agony and death floated before her eyes, and kept her awake at night. She watched long hours in the church in prayer; she fasted; she disciplined her tender body with sharp pains; she tried, after the fashion of those times, to atone for her sin, if sin it was. At last she had worked herself up into a religious frenzy. She saw St. Etheldreda in the clouds, towering over the isle, menacing the French host

with her virgin palm-branch. She uttered wild prophecies of ruin and defeat to the French; and then, when her frenzy collapsed, moaned secretly of ruin and defeat hereafter to themselves. But she would be bold; she would play her part; she would encourage the heroes who looked to her as one inspired, wiser and loftier than themselves.

And so it befell that, when the men marched down to Haddenham that afternoon, Torfrida rode at their head on a white charger, robed from throat to ankle in sackcloth, her fetters clanking on her limbs. But she called on the English to see in her the emblem of England captive yet unconquered; and to break her fetters, and the worse fetters of every woman in England who was the toy and slave of the brutal invaders; and so fierce a triumph sparkled from her wild hawk-eyes that the Englishmen looked up to her weird beauty as to that of an inspired saint; and when the French came on to the assault there stood on the grassy mound behind the English fort a figure clothed in sackcloth, barefooted and bareheaded, with fetters shining on waist and wrist and ankle — her long black locks streaming in the wind, her long white arms stretched crosswise toward heaven, in imitation of Moses of old above the battle with Amalek; invoking St. Etheldreda and all the powers of heaven, and chanting doom and defiance to the invaders.

And the English looked on her, and cried: "She is a prophetess! We will surely do some great deed this day, or die around her feet like heroes!"

And opposite to her, upon the French tower, the old hag of Brandon howled and gibbered with filthy gestures, calling for the thunderstorm which



Torfrida rode at their head, . . . her fetters clanking on her limbs.





did not come; for all above the sky was cloudless blue.

And the English saw and felt, though they could not speak it, dumb nation as they were, the contrast between the spirit of cruelty and darkness, and the spirit of freedom and light.

So strong was the new bridge, that William trusted himself upon it on horseback, with Ivo Taillebois at his side.

William doubted the powers of the witch, and felt rather ashamed of his new helpmate; but he was confident in his bridge, and in the heavy artillery which he had placed in his four towers.

Ivo Taillebois was utterly confident in his witch, and in the bridge likewise.

William waited for the rising of the tide; and when the tide was near its height, he commanded the artillery to open, and clear the fort opposite of the English. Then with crash and twang, the balistas and catapults went off, and great stones and heavy lances hurtled through the air.

"Back!" shouted Torfrida, raised almost to madness, by fasting, self-torture, and religious frenzy. "Out of yon fort, every man. Why waste your lives under that artillery? Stand still this day, and see how the saints of heaven shall fight for you."

So utter was the reverence which she commanded for the moment, that every man drew back, and crowded round her feet outside the fort.

"The cowards are fleeing already. Let your men go, sir king!" shouted Taillebois.

"On to the assault! Strike for Normandy!" shouted William.

"I fear much," said he to himself, "that this is

some stratagem of that Wake's. But conquered they must be."

The evening breeze curled up the reach. The great pike splashed out from the weedy shores, sending the whitefish flying in shoals into the low glare of the setting sun; and heeded not, stupid things, the barges packed with mailed men, which swarmed in the reeds on either side the bridge, and began to push out into the river.

The starlings swung in thousands round the reed-ronds, looking to settle in their wonted place; but dare not, and rose and swung round again, telling each other, in their manifold pipings, how all the reed-ronds teemed with mailed men. And all above, the sky was cloudless blue.

And then came a trample, a roll of many feet on the soft spongy peat, a low murmur which rose into wild shouts of "Dex Aie!" as a human tide poured along the causeway, and past the witch of Brandon Heath.

"Dex Aie?" quoth William, with a sneer. "Debbles Aie! would fit better."

"If, sire, the powers above would have helped us, we should have been happy enough to — but if they will not, it is not our fault if we try below," said Ivo Taillebois.

William laughed. "It is well to have two strings to one's bow, sir. Forward, men! forward!" shouted he, riding out to the bridge-end, under the tower.

"Forward!" shouted Ivo Taillebois.

"Forward!" shouted the hideous hag, overhead. "The spirit of the well fights for you."

"Fight for yourselves," said William.

There were fifty yards of deep clear water be-



tween Frenchman and Englishman. Only fifty yards. Not only the arrows and arblast quarrels, but heavy hand-javelins, flew across every moment; every now and then a man toppled forward, and plunged into the blue depth among the eels and pike, to find his comrades of the summer before; and then the stream was still once more. The coots and water-hens swam in and out of the reeds, and wondered what it was all about. The water-lilies flapped upon the ripple, as lonely as in the loneliest mere. But their floats were soon broken, their white cups stained with human gore. Fifty yards of deep clear water. And treasure inestimable to win by crossing it.

They thrust out balks, canoes, pontoons; they crawled upon them like ants, and thrust out more yet beyond, heedless of their comrades, who slipped, and splashed, and sank, holding out vain hands to hands too busy to seize them. And always the old witch jabbered overhead with her cantrips, pointing, mumming, praying for the storm; while all above, the sky was cloudless blue.

And always on the mound opposite, while darts and quarrels whistled round her head, stood Torfrida, pointing with outstretched, scornful finger at the strugglers in the river, and chanting loudly what the Frenchmen could not tell: but it made their hearts, as it was meant to do, melt like wax within them.

"They have a counter witch to yours, Ivo, it seems; and a fairer one. I am afraid the devils, especially if Asmodeus be at hand, are more likely to listen to her than to that old broomstick-rider aloft."

"Fair is, that fair cause has, sir king."

"A good argument for honest men, but none for fiends. What is the fair fiend pointing at so earnestly there?"

"Somewhat among the reeds. Hark to her now! She is singing, somewhat more like an angel than a fiend, I will say for her."

And Torfrida's song, coming clear and sweet across the water, rose louder and shriller till it almost drowned the jabbering of the witch.

"She sees more than we do."

"But I see!" cried William, smiting his hand upon his thigh. "Par le splendeur Dex! She has been showing them where to fire the reeds; and they have done it!"

A puff of smoke; a wisp of flame; and then another and another; and a canoe shot out from the reeds on the French shore, and glided into the reeds of the island.

"The reeds are on fire, men! Have a care," shouted Ivo.

"Silence, fool! Frighten them once, and they will leap like sheep into that gulf. Men! right about! draw off—slowly and in order. We will attack again to-morrow."

The cool voice of the great captain arose too late. A line of flame was leaping above the reed bed, crackling and howling before the evening breeze. The column on the causeway had seen their danger but too soon, and fled. But whither?

A shower of arrows, quarrels, javelins, fell upon the head of the column as it tried to face about and retreat, confusing it more and more. One arrow, shot by no common arm, went clean through

William's shield, and pinned it to the mailed flesh. He could not stifle a cry of pain.

"You are wounded, sire. Ride for your life! It is worth that of a thousand of these churls;" and Ivo seized William's bridle and dragged him, in spite of himself, through the cowering, shrieking, struggling crowd.

On came the flame, leaping and crackling, laughing and shrieking, like a live fiend. The archers and slingers in the boats cowered before it; and fell, scorched corpses, as it swept on. It reached the causeway, surged up, recoiled from the mass of human beings, then sprang over their heads and passed onwards, girding them with flame.

The reeds were burning around them; the timbers of the bridge caught fire; the peat and fagots smouldered beneath their feet. They sprang from the burning footway, and plunged into the fathomless bog, covering their faces and eyes with scorched hands; and then sank in the black gurgling slime.

Ivo dragged William on, regardless of curses and prayers from his soldiery; and they reached the shore just in time to see between them and the water a long black smouldering writhing line; the morass to right and left, which had been a minute before deep reed, an open smutty pool, dotted with boatsful of shrieking and cursing men; and at the causeway end the tower, with the flame climbing up its posts, and the witch of Brandon throwing herself desperately from the top, and falling dead upon the embers, a motionless heap of rags.

"Fool that thou art! Fool that I was!" cried

the great king, as he rolled off his horse at his tent door, cursing with rage and pain.

Ivo Taillebois sneaked off; sent over to Brandon for the second witch, and hanged her, as some small comfort to his soul. Neither did he forget to search the cabin, till he found buried in a crock the bits of his own gold chain, and various other treasures, for which the wretched old women had bartered their souls. All which he confiscated to his own use, as a much injured man.

The next day William withdrew his army. The men refused to face again that blood-stained pass. The English spells, they said, were stronger than theirs, and than the daring of brave men. Let William take Torfrida and burn her, as she had burned them, with reeds out of Willingham fen: then might they try to storm Ely again.

Torfrida saw them turn, flee, die in agony. Her work was done; her passion exhausted; her self-torture, and the mere weight of her fetters, which she had sustained during her passion, weighed her down; she dropped senseless on the turf, and lay in a trance for many hours.

Then she arose, and, casting off her fetters and her sackcloth, was herself again, but a sadder woman till her dying day.

CHAPTER XXXII

HOW KING WILLIAM TOOK COUNSEL OF A CHURCHMAN

IF Torfrida was exhausted, so was Hereward likewise. He knew well that a repulse was not a defeat. He knew well the indomitable persistence, the boundless resources, of the master-mind whom he defied; and he knew well that another attempt would be made, and then another; till, though it took seven years in the doing, Ely would be won at last. To hold out doggedly as he could was his plan: to obtain the best terms he could for his comrades. And he might obtain good terms at last. William might be glad to pay a fair price in order to escape such a thorn in his side as the camp of refuge, and might deal — or, at least, promise to deal — mercifully and generously with the last remnant of the English gentry. For himself, yield he would not: when all was over, he would flee to the sea, with Torfrida and his own housecarles, and turn Viking; or go to Sweyn Ulfsson in Denmark, and die a free man.

The English did not foresee these things. Their hearts were lifted up with their victory, and they laughed at William and his French, and drank Torfrida's health much too often for their own good. Hereward did not care to undeceive them. But he could not help speaking his mind in the abbot's chamber to Thurstan, Egelwin, and his

nephews, and to Sigtryg Ranaldsson, who was still in Ely, not only because he had promised to stay there, but because he could not get out if he would.

Blockaded they were utterly, by land and water. The isle furnished a fair supply of food; and what was wanting, they obtained by foraging. But they had laid the land waste for so many miles round, that their plundering raids brought them in less than of old; and if they went far, they fell in with the French, and lost good men, even though they were generally successful. So provisions were running somewhat short, and would run shorter still.

Moreover, there was a great cause of anxiety. Bishop Egelwin, Abbot Thurstan, and the monks of Ely were in rebellion, not only against King William, but more or less against the Pope of Rome. They might be excommunicated. The minster lands might be taken away.

Bishop Egelwin set his face like a flint. He expected no mercy. All he had ever done for the French was to warn Robert Comyn that if he stayed in Durham, evil would befall him. But that was as little worth to him as it was to the said Robert. And no mercy he craved. The less a man had, the more fit he was for heaven. He could but die; and that he had known ever since he was a chanter-boy. Whether he died in Ely, or in prison, mattered little to him, provided they did not refuse him the sacraments; and that they would hardly do. But call the Duke of Normandy his rightful sovereign he would not, because he was not — nor anybody else just now, as far as he could see.

Valiant likewise was Abbot Thurstan, for himself. But he had — unlike Bishop Egelwin, whose diocese had been given to a Frenchman — an abbey, monks, and broad lands, whereof he was father and steward. And he must do what was best for the abbey, and also what the monks would let him do. For severe as was the discipline of a minster in time of peace, yet in time of war, when life and death were in question, monks had ere now turned valiant from very fear, like Cato's mouse, and mutinied: and so might the monks of Ely.

And Edwin and Morcar?

No man knows what they said or thought; perhaps no man cared much, even in their own days. No hint does any chronicler give of what manner of men they were, or what manner of deeds they did. Fair, gentle, noble, beloved even by William, they are mere names, and nothing more, in history; and it is to be supposed, therefore, that they were nothing more in fact. The race of Leofric and Godiva had worn itself out.

One night the confederates had sat late, talking over the future more earnestly than usual. Edwin, usually sad enough, was especially sad that night.

Hereward jested with him, tried to cheer him: but he was silent, would not drink, and went away before the rest.

The next morning he was gone, and with him half-a-dozen of his private housecarles.

Hereward was terrified. If defections once began, they would be endless. The camp would fall to pieces, and every man among them would be hanged, mutilated, or imprisoned one by one helplessly. They must stand or fall together.

He went raging to Morcar. Morcar knew naught of it. On the faith and honor of a knight, he knew naught. Only his brother had said to him, a day or two before, that he must see his betrothed before he died.

"He is gone to William, then? Does he think to win her now — an outcast and a beggar — when he was refused her with broad lands and a thousand men at his back? Fool! See that thou play not the fool likewise, nephew, or ——"

"Or what?" said Morcar, defiantly.

"Or thou wilt go, whither Edwin is gone — to betrayal and ruin."

"Why so? He has been kind enough to Waltheof and Gospatric; why not to Edwin?"

"Because," laughed Hereward, "he wanted Waltheof, and he does not want you and Edwin. He can keep Mercia quiet without your help. Northumbria and the fens he cannot without Waltheof's. They are a rougher set as you go east and north, as you should know already; and must have one of themselves over them to keep them in good humor for a while. When he has used Waltheof as his stalking-horse long enough to build a castle every ten miles, he will throw him away like a worn bowstring, Earl Morcar, nephew mine."

Morcar shook his head.

In a week more he was gone likewise. He came to William at Brandon.

"You are come in at last, young earl?" said William, sternly. "You are come too late."

"I throw myself on your knightly faith," said Morcar. But he had come in an angry and unlucky hour.

"How well have you kept your own, twice a rebel, that you should appeal to mine? Take him away."

"And hang him?" asked Ivo Taillebois.

"Pish! No — thou old butcher. Put him in irons, and send him into Normandy."

"Send him to Roger de Beaumont, sire. Roger's son is safe in Morcar's castle, at Warwick, so it is but fair that Morcar should be safe in Roger's."

And to Roger de Beaumont he was sent, while young Roger was Lord of Warwick, and all around that once was Leofric and Godiva's.

Morcar lay in a Norman keep till the day of William's death. On his death-bed the tyrant's heart smote him, and he sent orders to release him. For a few short days or hours he breathed free air again. Then Rufus shut him up once more, and forever.

And that was the end of Earl Morcar.

A few weeks after, three men came to the camp at Brandon, and they brought a head to the king. And when William looked upon it, it was the head of Edwin.

The human heart must have burst up again in the tyrant, as he looked on the fair face of him he had so loved, and so wronged; for they say he wept.

The knights and earls stood round, amazed and awed, as they saw iron tears run down Pluto's cheek.

"How came this here, knaves?" thundered he, at last.

They told a rambling story, how Edwin always would needs go to Winchester, to see the queen, for she would stand his friend, and do him right.

And how they could not get to Winchester, for fear of the French, and wandered in woods and wolds; and how they were set upon, and hunted; and how Edwin still was mad to go to Winchester: but when he could not, he would go to Blethwallon and his Welsh; and how Earl Randal of Chester set upon them; and how they got between a stream and the tide-way of the Dee, and were cut off. And how Edwin would not yield. And how then they slew him in self-defence, and Randal let them bring the head to the king.

This, or something like it, was their story. But who could believe traitors? Where Edwin wandered, what he did during those months, no man knows. All that is known is, three men brought his head to William, and told some such tale. And so the old nobility of England died up and down the ruts and shaughs, like wounded birds; and, as of wounded birds, none knew or cared how far they had run, or how their broken bones had ached before they died.

"Out of their own mouths they are condemned, says Holy Writ," thundered William. "Hang them on high."

And hanged on high they were, on Brandon heath.

Then the king turned on his courtiers, glad to ease his own conscience by cursing them.

"This is your doing, sirs! If I had not listened to your base counsels, Edwin might have been now my faithful liegeman and my son-in-law; and I had had one more Englishman left in peace, and one sin less upon my soul."

"And one thorn less in thy side," quoth Ivo Taillebois.

"Who spoke to thee? Ralph Guader, thou gavest me the counsel: thou wilt answer it to God and his saints."

"That did I not. It was Earl Roger, because he wanted the man's Shropshire lands."

Whereon high words ensued; and the king gave the earl the lie in his teeth, which the earl did not forget.

"I think," said the rough shrewd voice of Ivo, "that instead of crying over spilt milk, — for milk the lad was, and never would have grown to good beef, had he lived to my age ——"

"Who spoke to thee?"

"No man, and for that reason I spoke myself. I have lands in Spalding, by your royal grace; and wish to enjoy them in peace, having worked for them hard enough — and how can I do that, as long as Hereward sits in Ely?"

"Splendeur Dex!" said William, "thou art right, old butcher."

So they laid their heads together to slay Hereward. And after they had talked awhile, then spoke William's chaplain for the nonce, an Italian, a friend and pupil of Lanfranc of Pavia, an Italian also, then Archbishop of Canterbury, scourging and imprisoning English monks in the South. And he spoke like an Italian of those times, who knew the ways of Rome.

"If his majesty will allow my humility to suggest ——"

"What? Thy humility is proud enough under the rose, I will warrant: but it has a Roman wit under the rose likewise. Speak!"

"That when the secular and carnal arm has

failed, as it is written[1] — He poureth contempt upon princes, and letteth them wander out of the way in the wilderness, or fens; — for the Latin word, and I doubt not the Hebrew, has both meanings."

"Splendeur Dex!" cried William, bitterly; "that hath He done with a vengeance! Thou art right so far, clerk!"

"Yet helpeth He the poor, videlicet, His church and the religious, who are vowed to holy poverty, out of misery, videlicet, the oppression of barbarous customs; and maketh them households like a flock of sheep."

"They do that for themselves already, here in England," said William, with a sneer at the fancied morals of the English monks and clergy.[2]

"But Heaven and the Church do it for the true poor, whom your majesty is bringing in, to your endless glory."

"But what has all this to do with taking Ely?" asked William, impatiently. "I asked thee for reason, and not sermons."

"This. That it is in the power of the Holy Father — and that power he would doubtless allow

[1] I do not laugh at Holy Scripture myself, I only insert this as a specimen of the usual mediæval "cant" — a name and a practice which are both derived, not from Puritans, but from monks.

[2] The alleged profligacy and sensuality of the English Church before the Conquest, rests merely on a few violent and vague expressions of the Norman monks who displaced them. No facts, as far as I can find, have ever been alleged. And without facts on the other side, an impartial man will hold by the one fact which is certain, that the Church of England, popish as it was, was, unfortunately for it, not popish enough; and from its insular freedom, obnoxious to the Church of Rome, and the ultramontane clergy of Normandy; and was therefore to be believed capable — and therefore again accused — of any and every crime.

you, as his dear son and most faithful servant, to employ for yourself, without sending to Rome, which might cause painful delays — to ——"

It might seem strange that William, Taillebois, Picot, Guader, Warrenne, short-spoken, hard-headed, hard-swearing warriors, could allow complacently a smooth churchman to dawdle on thus, counting his periods on his fingers, and seemingly never coming to the point.

But they knew well, that the churchman was a far cunninger as well as a more learned man than themselves. They knew well that they could not hurry him; and that they need not; that he would make his point at last, hunting it out step by step, and letting them see how he got thither, like a practised hound. They knew that if he spoke, he had thought long and craftily, till he had made up his mind; and that therefore he would very probably make up their minds likewise. It was the conquest — not of a heavenly spirit, though it boasted itself such — but of a cultivated mind, over brute flesh.

They might have said all this aloud, and yet the churchman would have gone on, as he did, where he left off, with unaltered blandness of tone.

"To convert to other uses the goods of the Church. To convert them to profane uses would, I need not say, be a sacrilege as horrible to heaven, as impossible to so pious a monarch——"

Ivo Taillebois winced. He had just stolen a manor from the monks of Crowland, and meant to keep it.

"To convert, I say, church lands belonging to abbeys or sees, whose abbots or bishops are contumaciously disobedient to the Holy See, or to

their lawful monarch, he being in the communion of the Church and at peace with the said Holy See. If therefore, to come to that point at which my incapacity, through the devious windings of my simplicity, has been tending, but with halting steps, from the moment that your majesty deigned to hear ——"

"Put in the spur, man!" said Ivo, tired at last, "and run the deer to soil."

"Hurry no man's cattle, especially thine own," answered the churchman, with so shrewd a wink and so cheery a voice that Ivo, when he recovered from his surprise, cried —

"Why, thou art a good huntsman thyself, I believe now."

"All things to all men, if by any means —— But to return. If your majesty should think fit to proclaim to the recalcitrants of Ely, that unless they submit themselves to your royal grace — and to that, of course, of His Holiness our father — within a certain day, you will convert to other uses — premising, to avoid scandal, that those uses shall be for the benefit of Holy Church — all lands and manors of theirs lying without the precincts of the isle of Ely — those lands being, as is known, large and of great value — Quid plura? Why burden your exalted intellect by detailing to you consequences which it has long ere now foreseen?"

". . ." quoth William, who was nearly as sharp as the Italian, and had seen it all. "I will make thee a bishop!"

"Spare to burden my weakness," said the chaplain; and slipped away into the shade.

"You will take his advice?" asked Ivo.

"I will."

"Then I shall see that Torfrida burn at last."

"Burn her?" and William swore.

"I promised my soldiers to burn the witch with reeds out of Haddenham fen, as she had burned them; and I must keep my knightly word."

William swore yet more. Ivo Taillebois was a butcher and a churl.

"Call me not churl and butcher too often, lord king, ere thou hast found whether thou needest me or not. Rough I may be, false was I never."

"That thou wert not," said William, who needed Taillebois much, and feared him somewhat; and remarked something meaning in his voice, which made him calm himself, diplomat as he was, instantly. "But burn Torfrida thou shalt not."

"Well, I care not. I have seen a woman burnt ere now, and had no fancy for the screeching. Besides, they say she is a very fair dame — and has a fair daughter, too, coming on — and she may very well make a wife for a Frenchman."

"Marry her thyself."

"I shall have to kill this Wake first."

"Then do it, and I will give thee his lands."

"I may have to kill others before the Wake."

"You may?"

And so the matter dropped. But William caught Ivo alone after an hour, and asked him what he meant.

"No pay, no play. Lord king, I have served thee well, rough and smooth."

"Thou hast, and hast been well paid. But if I have said aught hasty ——"

"Pish, king. I am a plain-spoken man, and like a plain-spoken master. But instead of marrying Torfrida or her daughter, I have more mind to

her niece, who is younger, and has no Hereward to be killed first."

"Her niece? Who?"

"Lucia, as we call her, Edwin and Morcar's sister, Hereward's niece, Torfrida's niece."

"No pay, no play, saidst thou?—so say I. What meant you by having to kill others before Hereward?"

"Beware of Waltheof," said Ivo.

"Waltheof? Pish. This is one of thy inventions for making me hunt every Englishman to death, that thou mayest gnaw their bones."

"Is it? Then this I say more. Beware of Ralph Guader."

"Pish!"

"Pish on, lord king." Etiquette was not yet discovered by Norman barons and earls, who thought themselves all but as good as their king; gave him their advice when they thought fit; and if he did not take it attacked him with all their meinie.

"Pish on, but listen. Beware of Roger."

"And what more?"

"And give me Lucia. I want her. I will have her."

William laughed. "Thou of all men? To mix that ditch-water with that wine?"

"They were mixed in thy blood, lord king; and thou art the better man for it, so says the world. Old wine and old blood throw any lees to the bottom of the cask; and we shall have a son worthy to ride behind ——"

"Take care!" quoth William.

"The greatest captain upon earth."

William laughed again, like Odin's self."

"Thou shalt have Lucia, for that word."

"And thou shalt have the plot ere it breaks. As it will."

"To this have I come at last," said William to himself. "To murder these English nobles; to marry their daughters to my grooms. Heaven forgive me! They have brought it upon themselves, by contumacy to Holy Church. Call my secretary, some one."

The Italian re-entered.

"The valiant and honorable and illustrious knight, Ivo Taillebois, Lord of Holland and Kesteven, weds Lucia, sister of the late earls Edwin and Morcar, now with the queen; and with her, her manors. You will prepare the papers."

"I am yours to death," said Ivo.

"To do thee justice, I think thou wert that already. Stay — here — sir priest — do you know any man who knows this Torfrida?"

"I do, king," said Ivo. "There is one Sir Ascelin, a man of Gilbert's, in the camp."

"Send for him."

"This Torfrida," said William, "haunts me."

"Pray heaven she have not bewitched your grace."

"Tut, I am too old a campaigner to take much harm by woman's sharpshooting, at fifteen score yards off, beside a deep stream between. No. The woman has courage — and beauty too, you say?"

"What of that, O prince?" said the Italian. "Who more beautiful — if report be true — than those lost women who dance nightly in the forests with Venus and Herodias — as it may be this Torfrida has done many a time?"

"You priests are apt to be hard upon poor women."

"The fox found that the grapes were sour," said the Italian, laughing at himself and his cloth — or at anything else, by which he could curry favor.

"And this woman was no vulgar witch. That sort of personage suits Taillebois' taste, rather than Hereward's."

"Hungry dogs eat dirty pudding," said Ivo, pertinently.

"The woman believed herself in the right. She believed that the saints of heaven were on her side. I saw it in her attitude, in her gestures. Perhaps she was right."

"Sire?" said both bystanders, in astonishment.

"I would fain see that woman; and see her husband too. They are folks after my own heart. I would give them an earldom to win them."

"I hope that in that day you will allow your faithful servant Ivo to retire to his ancestral manors in Anjou; for England will be too hot for him. Sire, you know not this man — a liar, a bully, a robber, a swash-buckling ruffian, who ——" And Ivo ran on with furious invective, after the fashion of the Normans, who considered no name too bad for an English rebel.

"Sir Ascelin," said William, as Ascelin came in, "you know Hereward?"

Ascelin bowed assent.

"Are these things true which Ivo alleges?"

"The Lord Taillebois may know best what manner of man Sir Hereward has become since he himself came into this English air, which changes some folks mightily," with a hardly disguised sneer at Ivo; "but in Flanders he was a very perfect knight, beloved and honored of all men, and especially of your father-in-law, the great marquis."

"He is a friend of yours, then?"

"No man less. I owe him more than one grudge, though all in fair quarrel; and one at least which only can be wiped out in blood."

"Eh? What?"

Ascelin hesitated.

"Tell me, sir!" thundered William, "unless you have aught to be ashamed of."

"It is no shame, as far as I know, to confess that I was once a suitor, as were all knights for miles round, for the hand of the once peerless Torfrida. And no shame to confess, that when Hereward knew thereof, he sought me out at a tournament, and served me as he has served many a better man before and since."

"Over thy horse's croup, eh?" said William.

"I am not a bad horseman, as all know, lord king. But heaven save me, and all I love, from that Hereward. They say he has seven men's strength, and I verily can testify to the truth thereof."

"That may be by enchantment," interposed the Italian.

"True, sir priest. This I know, that he wears enchanted armor, which Torfrida gave him before she married him."

"Enchantments again," said the secretary.

"Tell me now about Torfrida," said William.

Ascelin told him all about her, not forgetting to say — what, according to the chronicler, was a common report — that she had compassed Hereward's love by magic arts. She used to practise sorcery, he said, with her sorceress mistress, Richilda of Hainault. All men knew it. Arnoul, Richilda's son, was as a brother to her. And after old Baldwin died, and Baldwin of Mons and

Richilda came to Bruges, Torfrida was always with her, while Hereward was at the wars.

"The woman is a manifest and notorious witch," said the secretary.

"It seems so, indeed," said William, with something like a sigh. And so were Torfrida's early follies visited on her, as all early follies are. "But Hereward, you say, is a good knight and true?"

"Doubtless. Even when he committed that great crime at Peterborough ——"

"For which he and all his are duly excommunicated by the bishop," said the secretary.

"He did a very courteous and honorable thing." And Ascelin told how he had saved Alftruda, and instead of putting her to ransom, had sent her safe to Gilbert.

"A very knightly deed. He should be rewarded for it."

"Why not burn the witch, and reward him with Alftruda, instead, since your majesty is in so gracious a humor?" said Ivo.

"Alftruda? Who is she? Ay, I recollect her. Young Dolfin's wife. Why, she has a husband already."

"Ay, but his Holiness at Rome can set that right. What is there that he cannot do?"

"There are limits, I fear, even to his power. Eh, priest?"

"What his Holiness' powers as the viceroy of Divinity on earth might be, did he so choose, it were irreverent to inquire. But as he condescends to use that power only for the good of mankind, he condescends, like Divinity, to be bound by the very laws which he has promulgated for the benefit of his subjects; and to make himself only a life-

giving sun, when he might be a destructive thunderbolt."

"He is very kind, and we all owe him thanks," said Ivo, who had a confused notion that the Pope might strike him dead with lightning, but was good-natured enough not to do so. "Still, he might think of this plan, for they say that the lady is an old friend of Hereward's, and not overfond of her Scotch husband."

"That I know well," said William.

"And besides — if aught untoward should happen to Dolfin and his kin ——"

"She might, with her broad lands, be a fine bait for Hereward. I see. Now, do this, by my command. Send a trusty monk into Ely. Let him tell the monks that we have determined to seize all their outlying lands, unless they surrender within the week. And let him tell Hereward, by the faith and oath of William of Normandy, that if he will surrender himself to my grace, he shall have his lands in Bourne, and a free pardon for himself and all his comrades."

The men assented, much against their will, and went out on their errand.

"You have played me a scurvy trick, sir," said Ascelin to Ivo, "in advising the king to give the Lady Alftruda to Hereward."

"What! Did you want her yourself? On my honor I knew not of it. But have patience. You shall have her yet, and all her lands, if you will hear my counsel, and keep it."

"But you would give her to Hereward!"

"And to you too. It is a poor bait, say these frogs of fen-men, that will not take two pike running. Listen to me. I must kill this accursed fox

of a Wake. I hate him. I cannot eat my meat for thinking of him. Kill him I must."

"And so must I."

"Then we are both agreed. Let us work together, and never mind if one's blood be old and the other's new. I am neither fool nor weakly, as thou knowest."

Ascelin could not but assent.

"Then here. We must send the king's message. But we must add to it."

"That is dangerous."

"So is war; so is eating, drinking; so is everything. But we must not let the Wake come in. We must drive him to despair. Make the messenger add but one word — that the king exempts from the amnesty Torfrida, on account of—— You can put it into more scholarly shape than I can."

"On account of her abominable and notorious sorceries; and demands that she shall be given up forthwith, to be judged as she deserves."

"Just so. And then for a load of reeds out of Haddenham fen!"

"Heaven forbid!" said Ascelin, who had loved her once. "Would not perpetual imprisonment suffice?"

"What care I? That is the king's affair, not ours. But I fear we shall not get her. Even so Hereward will flee with her — maybe escape to Flanders or Denmark. He can escape through a rat's hole if he will. However, then we are at peace. I had sooner kill him and have done with it; but out of the way he must be put."

So they sent a monk in with the message; and commanded him to tell the article about the Lady

Torfrida, not only to Hereward, but to the abbot and all the monks.

A curt and fierce answer came back, not from Hereward, but from Torfrida herself — that William of Normandy was no knight himself, or he would not offer a knight his life, on condition of burning his lady.

William swore horribly. "What is all this about?" They told him — as much as they chose to tell him. He was very wroth. "Who was Ivo Taillebois, to add to his message? He had said that Torfrida should not burn." Taillebois was stout; for he had won the secretary over to his side meanwhile. He had said nothing about burning. He had merely supplied an oversight of the king's. The woman, as the secretary knew, could not, with all deference to his majesty, be included in an amnesty. She was liable to ecclesiastical censure and the ecclesiastical courts.

"Ecclesiastical courts? What is this new doctrine, churchman?" asked William.

"The superstition of sorcery, my lord king, is neither more nor less than that of heresy itself; seeing that the demons whom it invokes are none other than the old Pagan gods: and as heresy ——"

William exploded with fearful oaths. He was always jealous (and wisely) for his own prerogatives. And the doctrine was novel, at least in England. Witches were here considered as offenders against the private person enchanted, rather than against the Church; and executions for witchcraft rarely, if ever, took place, unless when the witch was supposed to have injured life or property.

"Have I not given you churchmen enough already, that you must assume my king's power of

life and death? Do I not slay and torment enough, heaven forgive me! without needing you to help me?"

The Italian saw that he had gone too far. "Heaven forbid," he said, "that the Church should stain her hands with the blood of the worst of sinners. All she could do was, having proved guilt, to deliver the offender over to the secular arm, doubtless with merciful entreaties that there might be no shedding of blood."

"There is none, I presume, when folks are burned alive," quoth William, with a sneer. "So you are to be the judges, and me your executioner, eh? An honorable office, truly. Beware, sir clerk! Beware!"

"If the fire of my zeal has for a moment too rashly melted the ice of my modesty ——"

"Of thy craft, say ——"

"My humility humbly entreats forgiveness. I do not press the matter. Only it seemed — it seemed at least to me, that after the slight scandal — forgive my fidelity the word — to the faithful caused by your highness' unhappy employment of the witch of Brandon ——"

William cursed under his breath.

"Your highness might nobly atone therefor, by executing justice on a far more flagitious offender, who has openly compassed and effected the death of hundreds of your highness' otherwise invincible warriors ——"

"And throw good money after bad," said William, laughing. "I tell thee, priest, she is too pretty to burn, were she the Witch of Endor herself."

"Be it so. Your royal clemency can always



remit her sentence, even so far as to pardon her entirely, if your merciful temper should so incline you. But meanwhile, what better could we have done, than to remind the monks of Ely that she was a sorceress; that she had committed grave crimes, and was liable to punishment herself, and they to punishment also, as her shelterers and accomplices?"

"What your highness wanted," quoth Taillebois, "was to bring over the monks; and I believe that message had been a good stroke toward that. As for Hereward, you need not think of him. He never will come in alive. He has sworn an oath, and he will keep it."

And so the matter ended.

CHAPTER XXXIII

HOW THE MONKS OF ELY DID AFTER THEIR KIND

WILLIAM'S bolt, or rather inextinguishable Greek fire, could not have fallen into Ely at a more propitious moment.

Hereward was away, with a large body of men and many ships, foraging in the northeastern fens. He might not be back for a week.

Abbot Thurstan — for what cause is not said — had lost heart a little while before, and fled to "Angerhale, taking with him the ornaments and treasure of the church."

Hereward had discovered his flight with deadly fear; but provisions he must have, and forth he must go, leaving Ely in charge of half-a-dozen independent English gentlemen, each of whom would needs have his own way, just because it was his own.

Only Torfrida he took, and put her hand into the hand of Sigtryg Ranaldsson, and said, "Thou true comrade and perfect knight, as I did by thy wife, do thou by mine, if aught befall."

And Sigtryg swore first by the white Christ, and then by the head of Sleipnir, Odin's horse, that he would stand by Torfrida till the last; and then, if need was, slay her.

"You will not need, King Sigtryg. I can slay

myself," said she, as she took the Ost-Dane's hard honest hand.

And Hereward went, seemingly by Mepal or Sutton. Then came the message; and all men in Ely knew it.

Torfrida stormed down to the monks, in honest indignation, to demand that they should send to William, and purge her of the calumny. She found the chapter-door barred and bolted. They were all gabbling inside, like starlings on a foggy morning, and would not let her in. She hurried back to Sigtryg, fearing treason, and foreseeing the effect of the message upon the monks.

But what could Sigtryg do? To find out their counsels was impossible for him, or any man in Ely. For the monks could talk Latin, and the men could not. Torfrida alone knew the sacred tongue.

If Torfrida could but listen at the keyhole. Well — all was fair in war. And to the chapter-house door she went, guarded by Sigtryg and some of his housecarles; and listened with a beating heart. She heard words now incomprehensible. That men who most of them lived no better than their own serfs; who could have no amount of wealth, not even the hope of leaving that wealth to their children — that such men should cling to wealth; struggle, forge, lie, do anything for wealth, to be used almost entirely not for themselves, but for the honor and glory of the convent — indicates an intensity of corporate feeling unknown in the outer world then or now.

The monastery would be ruined. Without this manor, without that wood, without that stone quarry, that fishery — what would become of them?

But mingled with those words were other words,

unfortunately more intelligible to this day — those of superstition.

What would St. Etheldreda say? What St. Sexburga, St. Withburga, St. Ermenilda? How dare they provoke their wrath? Would they submit to lose their lands? They might do — what might they not do? Their bones would refuse ever to work a miracle again. They had been but too slack in miracle-working for many years. They might strike the isle with barrenness, the minster with lightning. They might send a flood up the fens. They might ——

William the Norman, to do them justice, those valiant monks feared not; for he was man, and could but kill the body. But St. Etheldreda, a virgin goddess, with her three maidens, and indeed, all the host of heaven to back her — might she not, by intercession with powers still higher than her own, destroy both body and soul in hell?

"We are betrayed. They are going to send for the abbot from Angerhale," said Torfrida at last, reeling from the door. "All is lost."

"Shall we burst open the door and kill them all?" asked Sigtryg, simply.

"No, king — no. They are God's men; and we have blood enough upon our souls."

"We can keep the gates, lest any go out to the king."

"Impossible. They know the isle better than we, and have a thousand arts."

So all they could do was to wait in fear and trembling for Hereward's return, and send Martin Lightfoot off to warn him, wherever he might be.

The monks remained perfectly quiet. The organ droned, the chants wailed as usual; nothing inter-

rupted the stated order of the services; and in the hall, each day, they met the knights as cheerfully as ever. Greed and superstition had made cowards of them — and now traitors.

It was whispered that Abbot Thurstan had returned to the minster: but no man saw him: and so three or four days went on.

Martin found Hereward after incredible labors, and told him all, clearly and shrewdly. The man's manifest insanity only seemed to quicken his wit, and increase his powers of bodily endurance.

Hereward was already on his way home; and never did he and his good men row harder than they rowed that day back to Sutton. He landed, and hurried on with half his men, leaving the rest to disembark the booty. He was anxious as to the temper of the monks. He foresaw all that Torfrida had foreseen. And as for Torfrida herself, he was half mad. Ivo Taillebois' addition to William's message had had its due effect. He vowed even deadlier hate against the Frenchman than he had ever felt before. He ascended the heights to Sutton. It was his shortest way to Ely. He could not see Aldreth from thence: but he could see Willingham field, and Belsar's hills, round the corner of Haddenham Hill.

The sun was setting long before they reached Ely: but just as he sank into the western fen, Winter stopped, pointing. Was that the flash of arms? There, far away, just below Willingham town. Or was it the setting sun upon the ripple of some long water?

"There is not wind enough for such a ripple," said one. But ere they could satisfy themselves, the sun was down, and all the fen was gray.

[illegible] was all over [illegible]. If that had been the last [illegible] I must have come off a very sore [illegible] [illegible] a moment, on the road between [illegible] and Ely. He hastened on his way. But as they were within sight of the [illegible]-tree, they were aware of a horse galloping [illegible] [illegible] through the dusk. Someone called [illegible]. He must be run down and [illegible] [illegible]. He must be pulled up [illegible]. It was [illegible] a girl, with a scarf [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] her waist.

'Patricia!' [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]! And he [illegible] [illegible]. 'Thank heaven, dear saint!' a voice [illegible].

It was the voice of [illegible].

'Patricia!' he gasped.

'I knew it.'

'The French are in the [illegible]. They have got [illegible]. The whole army is marching from Cambridge. The whole fleet is coming up from Southsea. And you have run——'

'I have fly over the [illegible] heads. Mon! Get hogwood as if you [illegible] make yourselves [illegible] and [illegible].'

Then rose a babel of questions which Patricia answered as she could. But she had nothing to tell. 'Cecil coming,' she said [illegible], 'was an overmatch for woman's wit.' She had sent out a spy: but he had not returned all an hour since. Then he came back breathless with the news that the French army was on the march from Cambridge, and that as he came over the water at Aldreth he found a party of French knights in the fort on the Ely side, talking peaceably with the monks on guard.



She had run up to the borough hill — which men call Cherry Hill at this day — and one look to the northeast had shown her the river swarming with ships. She had rushed home, put boys' clothes on herself and her child, hid a few jewels in her bosom, saddled Swallow, and ridden for life thither.

"And King Sigtryg?"

He and his men had gone desperately out towards Haddenham, with what English they could muster: but all were in confusion. Some were getting the women and children into boats, to hide them in the reeds; others battering the minster gates, vowing vengeance on the monks.

"Then Sigtryg will be cut off! Alas for the day that ever brought his brave heart hither!"

And when the men heard that, a yell of fury and despair burst from all throats.

Should they go back to their boats?

"No! onward," cried Hereward. "Revenge first, and safety after. Let us leave nothing for the accursed Frenchmen but smoking ruins, and then gather our comrades, and cut our way back to the North."

"Good counsel," cried Winter. "We know the roads, and they do not; and in such a dark night as is coming, we can march out of the island without their being able to follow us a mile."

They hurried on; but stopped once more, at the galloping of another horse.

"Who comes, friend or foe?"

"Alywn, son of Orgar!" cried a voice under breath. "Don't make such a noise, men! The French are within half a mile of you."

"Then one traitor monk shall die ere I retreat," cried Hereward, seizing him by the throat.

"For heaven's sake, hold!" cried Torfrida, seizing his arm. "You know not what he may have to say."

"I am no traitor, Hereward; I have fought by your side as well as the best; and if any but you had called Alywn ——"

"A curse on your boasting. Tell us the truth."

"The abbot has made peace with the king. He would give up the island, and St. Etheldreda should keep all her lands and honors. I said what I could: but who was I to resist the whole chapter? Could I alone brave St. Etheldreda's wrath?"

"Alwyn, the valiant, afraid of a dead girl!"

"Blaspheme not, Hereward! She may hear you at this moment! Look there!" and pointing up, the monk cowered in terror, as a meteor flashed through the sky.

"That is St. Etheldreda shooting at us, eh? Then all I can say is, she is a very bad marksman. And the French are in the island?"

"They are."

"Then forward, men, for one half-hour's pleasure; and then to die like Englishmen."

"On?" cried Alwyn. "You cannot go on. The king is at Whichford at this moment with all his army, half a mile off! Right across the road to Ely!"

Hereward grew Berserk. "On! men!" shouted he, "we shall kill a few Frenchmen apiece before we die!"

"Hereward," cried Torfrida, "you shall not go on! If you go, I shall be taken. And if I am taken, I shall be burned. And I cannot burn — I cannot! I shall go mad with terror before I come

to the stake. I cannot go stripped to my smock before those Frenchmen. I cannot be roasted piecemeal! Hereward, take me away! Take me away! or kill me, now and here!"

He paused. He had never seen Torfrida thus overcome.

"Let us flee! The stars are against us. God is against us! Let us hide—escape abroad: beg our bread, go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem together—for together it must be always: but take me away!"

"We will go back to the boats, men," said Hereward.

But they did not go. They stood there, irresolute, looking towards Ely.

The sky was pitchy dark. The minster-roofs, lying northeast, were utterly invisible against the blackness.

"We may at least save some who escape out," said Hereward. "March on quickly to the left, under the hill to the plough-field."

They did so.

"Lie down, men. There are the French, close on our right. Down among the bushes."

And they heard the heavy tramp of men within a quarter of a mile.

"Cover the mare's eyes, and hold her mouth, lest she neigh," said Winter.

Hereward and Torfrida lay side by side upon the heath. She was shivering with cold and horror. He laid his cloak over her; put his arm round her.

"Your stars did not foretell you this, Torfrida." He spoke not bitterly, but in utter sadness.

She burst into an agony of weeping.

"My stars at least foretold me nothing but woe, since first I saw your face."

"Why did you marry me, then?" asked he, half angrily.

"Because I loved you. Because I love you still."

"Then you do not regret?"

"Never, never, never! I am quite happy — quite happy. Why not?"

A low murmur from the men made them look up. They were near enough to the town to hear — only too much. They heard the tramp of men, shouts and yells. Then the shrill cries of women. All dull and muffled the sounds came to them through the still night; and they lay there spell-bound, as in a nightmare, as men assisting at some horrible tragedy, which they had no power to prevent. Then there was a glare, and a wisp of smoke against the black sky, and then a house began burning brightly, and then another.

"This is the Frenchman's faith!"

And all the while, as the sack raged in the town below, the minster stood above, glaring in the fire-light, silent and safe. The church had provided for herself, by sacrificing the children beneath her fostering shadow.

They waited nearly an hour, but no fugitives came out.

"Come, men," said Hereward, wearily, "we may as well to the boats."

And so they went, walking on like men in a dream, as yet too stunned to realize to themselves the hopeless horror of their situation. Only Hereward and Torfrida saw it all, looking back on the splendid past — the splendid hopes for the future: glory, honor, an earldom, a free Danish England — and this was all that was left!

"No, it is not!" cried Torfrida suddenly, as if answering her own unspoken thoughts, and his. "Love is still left. The gallows and the stake cannot take that away." And she clung closer to her husband's side and he again to hers.

They reached the shore, and told their tale to their comrades. "Whither now?"

"To Well. To the wide mere,"[1] said Hereward.

"But their ships will hunt us out there."

"We shall need no hunting. We must pick up the men at Cissham. You would not leave them to be murdered, too, as we have left the Ely men?"

No. They would go to Well. And then?

"The Bruneswold, and the merry greenwood," said Hereward.

"Hey for the merry greenwood!" shouted Leofric the Deacon. And the men, in the sudden delight of finding any place, any purpose, answered with a lusty cheer.

"Brave hearts!" said Hereward. "We will live and die together like Englishmen."

"We will, we will, Viking."

"Where shall we stow the mare?" asked Gery; "the boats are full already."

"Leave her to me. On board, Torfrida."

He got on board last, leading the mare by the bridle.

[1] Probably near Upwell and Outwell, in the direction of Wisbeach. There the old Nene and the old Welney rivers joining, formed vast morasses, now laid dry by the Middle Level and Marshland drains. The bursting of the Middle Level sluice in the year 1861 restored for a while a vast tract in these fens to its primeval state of "the wide mere." From this point Hereward could escape north into Lincolnshire, either by Wisbeach and the Wash, or by Crowland and Bourne.

"Swim, good lass!" said he, as they pushed off; and the good lass, who had done it many a time before, waded in, and was soon swimming behind. Hereward turned, and bent over the side in the darkness. There was a strange gurgle, a splash, and a swirl. He turned round, and sat upright again. They rowed on.

"That mare will never swim all the way to Well," said one.

"She will not need it," said Hereward.

"Why?" said Torfrida, feeling in the darkness, "she is loose. What is this in your hand? Your dagger? and wet?"

"Mare Swallow is at the bottom of the reach. We could never have got her to Well."

"And you have——" cried a dozen voices.

"Do you think that I would let a cursed Frenchman—ay, even William's self—say that he had bestridden Hereward's mare?"

None answered; but Torfrida, as she laid her head upon her husband's bosom, felt the great tears running down from his cheek on to her own.

None spoke a word. The men were awe-stricken. There was something despairing and ill-omened in the deed. And yet there was a savage grandeur in it, which bound their savage hearts still closer to their chief.

And so Mare Swallow's bones lie somewhere in the peat unto this day.

They got to Well; they sent out spies to find the men who had been "wasting Cissham with fire and sword:" and at last brought them in. Ill news, as usual, had travelled fast. They had heard of the fall of Ely, and hidden themselves "in a

certain very small island which is called Stimtench," where, thinking that the friends in search of them were Frenchmen in pursuit, they hid themselves amongst the high reeds. There two of them — one Starkwulf by name, the other Broher — hiding near each other, "thought that, as they were monks, it might conduce to their safety if they had shaven crowns; and set to work with their swords to shave each other's heads as well as they could. But at last, by their war-cries and their speech, recognizing each other, they left off fighting," and went after Hereward,

So jokes, grimly enough, the old chronicler, who may have seen them come in the next morning with bleeding coxcombs, and could laugh over the thing in after years. But he was in no humor for jesting in the days in which they lay at Well. Nor was he in jesting humor when, a week afterwards, hunted by the French from Well, and forced to take to meres and waterways known only to them, and too shallow and narrow for the French ships, they found their way across into the old Nen, and so on toward Crowland, leaving Peterborough far on the left. For as they neared Crowland, they saw before them, rowing slowly, a barge full of men. And as they neared that barge, behold, all they who rowed were blind of both their eyes; and all they who sat and guided them, were maimed of both their hands. And as they came alongside, there was not a man in all that ghastly crew but was an ancient friend, by whose side they had fought full many a day, and with whom they had drunk deep full many a night. They were the firstfruits of William's vengeance; thrust into that boat, to tell the rest of the fen-men

what those had to expect who dared oppose the Norman. And they were going to Crowland, to the sanctuary of the Danish fen-men, that they might cast themselves down before St. Guthlac, and ask of him that mercy for their souls which the Conqueror had denied to their bodies. Alas for them! They were but a handful among hundreds, perhaps thousands, of mutilated cripples, who swarmed all over England, and especially in the North and East, throughout the reign of the Norman conquerors. They told their comrades' fate, slaughtered in the first attack, or hanged afterwards as rebels and traitors to a foreigner whom they had never seen, and to whom they owed no fealty by law of God and man.

"And Sigtryg Ranaldsson?"

None knew aught of him. He never got home again to his Irish princess.

"And the poor women?" asked Torfrida.

But she received no answer.

And the men swore a great oath, and kept it: never to give quarter to a Frenchman, as long as there was one left on English ground.

Neither were the monks of Ely in jesting humor, when they came to count up the price of their own baseness. They had obeyed the apostolic injunction, "to submit to the powers that be because they are ordained," etc. But they found their return (as the Book of Ely calls it) to "a more wholesome counsel," beset with thorns. The king barred them out of the monastery, lest the monks should come out with crosses and relics to implore his mercy. Going into the minster, he stood afar off from the holy body of St. Etheldreda, and cast a mark of gold on the altar, as a peace-offering to



that terrible lady; and then retired to Whichford, leaving his soldiers to work their wicked will. So terrified were the poor monks, that no mass was celebrated that day: but as the hours wore on, they needs must eat. And as they ate, there entered to them into the refectory Gilbert of Clare:

"Ye English swine, could ye find no other time to feed? The king is in the minster."

Out hurried the monks, but too late. The king was gone; and hardly, by humbling themselves to their old enemy Gilbert, did they obtain grace of the king for seven hundred marks of silver. The which money they took, as they had promised, to Picot the Viscount of Cambridge. He weighed it; and finding it an ounce short, accused them of cheating the king, and sentenced them to pay three hundred marks more. Then was lost all the gold and silver which was left in Ely: the image of St. Mary with her child, sitting on a throne, wrought with wondrous skill, which Elfsy the abbot had made of gold and silver, was broken up; and the images of the guardian virgins stripped of their precious ornaments. After which the royal commissioners came, plundered the abbey of all that was left of those treasures which had been brought from every quarter into the camp of refuge, of which a curious inventory remains to this day.

Thurstan, the traitor abbot, died in a few months. Egelwin, the Bishop of Durham, was taken in the abbey. He was a bishop, and they dared not kill him. But he was a patriot, and must have no mercy. They accused him of stealing the treasures of Durham, which he had brought to Ely, for the service of his country; and shut him up in Abing-

don. A few months after, the brave man was found starved and dead, "whether of his own will, or enforced;" and so ended another patriot prelate. But we do not read that the Normans gave back the treasures to Durham. And so, yielding an immense mass of booty, and many a fair woman, as the Norman's prey, ended the camp of refuge, and the glory of the isle of Ely.

But not the wrath of St. Etheldreda. Whatever she might have done when on earth, she was not inclined, as patroness of Ely, to obey the apostolic injunction, and "take joyfully the spoiling of her goods;" and she fell upon those who had robbed her of her gay garments and rich manors, and left her to go in russet for many a year, with such strokes as proved that the monks had chosen the less of two evils, when they preferred falling into the hands of an angry king to falling into those of an angry saint. Terrible was the fate of Roger Picot's man Gervase, who dared to harry and bind St. Etheldreda's men; who even brought an action at law against the abbot himself. The very night before the trial, St. Etheldreda, and her two sisters St. Withburga and Sexburga, stabbed him to the heart with the spikes of their pastoral staves, and he died, to the terror of all bystanders.

Worse, even, was the fate of Roger Picot himself, "the hungry lion, the prowling wolf, the crafty fox, the filthy swine, the shameless dog," who had said, "Who is this Etheldreda, whose lands ye say that I have taken? I know not Etheldreda, and I will not give up her lands."

"Listen, ye isles, and attend, ye people from afar off, what her spouse hath done for the Lady of Ely. His sin, saith Scripture, is sought, and shall not be

found. By whom is it sought? By Him from whom nothing is hidden. By whom shall it be found? By no man, since none know His day. Whither he is gone, why he fled, or how he has died; whether he has descended alive into the pit with Dathan and Abyrom, or become a beast with Nabuchadonossor; hath vanished utterly, or by any other mode hath perished, to be damned without end. But one thing we know for certain, that in our bounds he has appeared no more, but has disappeared forever to-day. Glory to Him who has given us the victory over our enemy."

Worse again (according to those of Ely) was the fate of Earl William de Warrenne, who violently withheld some farms from St. Etheldreda. For on the night on which he died, the then abbot heard his soul carried off by demons, crying in vain to heaven for mercy. Therefore when his lady, Gundreda (William the Conqueror's step-daughter), a few days after, sent a hundred shillings for his soul to the minster at Ely, the abbot and his monks sent them back, neither deigning nor daring to take the money of a damned man. So there is no hope for Earl Warrenne, were it not that the Cluniac monks, whom he had established at Lewes, holding naturally a different opinion of him and his deeds, buried him there in splendor, and put up over his tomb a white marble slab, on which were set forth his virtues, and the present protection and future rewards which St. Pancras was to procure for him in return for the minster which he had raised in honor of that mighty avenger of perjury.[1]

After which — whether St. Pancras did or did not deliver Earl William from the wrath of St. Ethel-

[1] Ordericus Vitalis, book viii. c. 9.

dreda — the Lady of Ely was appeased; and when almost all the monks were either sick or dying (possibly from one of those fevers which so often devastated the fens), she was seen, after long fastings and vigils, by a holy man named Goderic staying the hand of some mighty being, who was in act to shoot an arrow from heaven against the doomed borough. After which, watching and praying still more fervently, he beheld St. Etheldreda and her maidens rise from their tombs by night, and walk majestic through choir and cloister, and so to the sick-house and the dying monks. And there the Lady of Ely went round to every bed, and laid her pure hand upon the throbbing forehead and wiped the typhus-gore from the faded lips with her sacred sleeve, and gave the sufferers sudden health and strength; and signified to Goderic, who had followed her trembling afar off, that all was forgiven and forgotten.[1]

[1] For all these tales (the last is told with much pathos), see the Liber Eliensis, book ii. §§ 119–133.

CHAPTER XXXIV

HOW HEREWARD WENT TO THE GREENWOOD

AND now is Hereward to the greenwood gone, to be a bold outlaw; and not only an outlaw himself, but the father of all outlaws, who held those forests for two hundred years, from the fens to the Scottish border. Utlages, forestiers, latrunculi, sicarii, sauvages, who prided themselves upon sleeping on the bare ground — they were accursed by the conquerors, and beloved by the conquered. The Norman viscount or sheriff commanded to hunt them from hundred to hundred, with hue and cry, horse and bloodhound. The English yeoman left for them a keg of ale, or a basket of loaves, beneath the hollins green, as sauce for their meal of "nombles of the dere."

> "For hart and hind, and doe and roe,
> Were in that forest great plentie,"

and

> "Swannes and fesauntes they had full good,
> And foules of the rivere.
> There fayled never so lytell a byrde,
> That ever was bred on brere."

With the same friendly yeoman "that was a good felawe," they would lodge by twos and threes during the sharp frosts of midwinter, in the lonely

farmhouse which stood in the "field" or forest-clearing: but for the greater part of the year their "lodging was on the cold ground" in the holly thickets, or under the hanging rock, or in a lodge of boughs.

And then, after a while, the life which began in terror, and despair, and poverty, and loss of land and kin, became not only tolerable, but pleasant. Bold men and hardy, they cared less and less for

> "The thornie wayes, the deep valleys,
> The snowe, the frost, the rayne,
> The colde, the hete; for dry or wete
> We must lodge on the plaine,
> And us above, none other roofe
> But a brake bushe, or twayne."

And they found fair lasses, too, in time, who, like Torfrida and Maid Marian, would answer with the nut-brown maid, to their warnings against the outlaw life, that —

> "Amonge the wild dere, such an archere
> As men say that ye be,
> He may not fayle of good vitayle,
> Where is so great plentè:
> And water clere of the rivere,
> Shall be full swete to me,
> With which in hele, I shall right wele,
> Endure, as ye may see."

Then called they themselves "merry men;" and the forest the "merry greenwood;" and sang, with Robin Hood,

> "A merrier man than I, belyve
> There lives not in Christentie."

They were coaxed back, at times, to civilized life; they got their grace of the king, and entered

the king's service; but the craving after the greenwood was upon them. They dreaded and hated the four stone walls of a Norman castle; and, like Robin Hood, slipped back to the forest and the deer.

Gradually, too, law and order rose among them, lawless as they were; that instinct of discipline and self-government, side by side with that of personal independence, which is the peculiar mark, and peculiar strength, of the English character. Who knows not how, in the "Lytell Geste of Robin Hood," they shot at "pluck-buffet," the king among them disguised as an abbot; and every man who missed the rose-garland, "his tackle he should tyne;"

"And bere a buffet on his head
Iwys ryght all bare,
And all that fell on Robyn's lote,
He smote them wonder sair.

"Till Robyn fayled of the garlonde
Three fyngers and mair."

Then good Gilbert bids him in his turn

"'Stand forth and take his pay.'

"'If it be so,' sayd Robyn,
'That may no better be,
Syr abbot, I delyver thee myn arrowe,
I pray thee, syr, serve thou me.'

"'It falleth not for myne order,' saith the kynge,
'Robyn, by thy leve,
For to smyte no good yeman,
For doute I should hym greve.'

"'Smyte on boldly,' sayd Robyn,
'I give thee large leve.'
Anon our kynge, with that word,
He folde up his sleve.

"And such a buffet he gave Roiyn,
To grounde he rolde full nere.
'I make myne avowe,' sayd Roiyn,
'Thou art a stalwarte frere.'

"'There is pyth in thyn arme,' sayd Roiyn,
'I rowe thou canst well shoote.'
Thus our lyonge and Roiyn Hoode
Together they are met."

Hard knocks in good humor, strict rules, fair play, and equal justice for high and low; this was the old outlaw spirit, which has descended to their inlawed descendants; and makes, to this day, the life and marrow of an English public school.

One fixed idea the outlaw had — hatred of the invader. If "his herd were the king's deer," "his treasure was the earl's purse;" and still oftener the purse of the foreign churchman, Frenchman or Italian, who had expelled the outlaw's English cousins from their convents; scourged and imprisoned them, as the blessed Archbishop Lanfranc did at Canterbury, because they would not own allegiance to a French abbot; or murdered them at the high altar, as did the new abbot of Glastonbury, because they would not change their old Gregorian chant for that of William of Fécamp.[1]

On these mitred tyrants the outlaw had no mercy, as far as their purses were concerned. Their persons, as consecrated, were even to him sacred and inviolable — at least, from wounds and death; and one may suppose Hereward himself to have been the first author of the laws afterward attributed to Robin Hood. As for "robbing

[1] See the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

and reving, beting and bynding," free warren was allowed against the Norman.

"'Thereof no fors,' said Robyn,
'We shall do well enow.
But look ye do no housebonde harme,
That tylleth wyth his plough.

"'No more ye shall no good yemàn,
That walketh by grene wood shawe;
Ne no knyght, ne no squyer,
That will be good felàwe.

"'These bysshoppes, and these archbysshoppes
Ye shall them bete and binde;
The hye sheryff of Nottingham,
Hym holde in your mynde."

. . . . . .

"Robyn loved our dear Ladye,
For doubt of dedely synne,
Wolde he never do company harm
That any woman was ynne."

And even so it was with the Wake when he was in the Bruneswold, if the old chroniclers are to be believed.

And now Torfrida was astonished. She had given way utterly at Ely, from woman's fear and woman's disappointment. All was over. All was lost. What was left, save to die?

But — and it was a new and unexpected fact to one of her excitable southern blood, easily raised and easily depressed — she discovered that neither her husband, nor Winter, nor Gery, nor Wenoch, nor Ranald of Ramsey, nor even the romancing harping Leofric, thought that all was lost. She argued it with them, not to persuade them into base submission, but to satisfy her own surprise.

"But what will you do?"

"Live in the greenwood."

"And what then?"

"Burn every town which a Frenchman holds, and kill every Frenchman we meet."

"But what plan have you?"

"Who wants a plan, as you call it, while he has the green hollies overhead, the dun deer on the lawn, bow in his hand, and sword by his side?"

"But what will be the end of it all?"

"We shall live till we die."

"But William is master of all England."

"What is that to us? He is not our master."

"But he must be some day. You will grow fewer and fewer. His government will grow stronger and stronger."

"What is that to us? When we are dead, there will be brave yeomen in plenty to take our place. You would not turn traitor?"

"I? never! never! I will live and die with you in your greenwood, as you call it. Only — I did not understand you English."

Torfrida did not. She was discovering the fact, which her nation have more than once discovered since, that the stupid valor of the Englishman never knows when it is beaten; and sometimes, by that self-satisfied ignorance, succeeds in not being beaten after all.

So the Wake — if the chroniclers speak truth — assembled a formidable force, well-nigh, at last, four hundred men. Winter, Gery, Wenoch, Grogan, one of the Azers of Lincoln, were still with him. Ranald the seneschal still carried his standard. Of Duti and Outi, the famous brothers, no more is heard. A valiant Matelgar takes their place; Alfric and Sexwold and many another gallant

fugitive cast up, like scattered hounds, at the sound of "the Wake's" war-horn. There were those among them (says Gaimar) who scorned to fight single-handed less than three Frenchmen. As for the Wake, he would fight seven,

> "Les quatre oscist, les treis fuirent;
> Naffrez, sanglant, cil s'en partirent
> En plusurs lius issi avint,
> K'encontre seit très bien se tuit.
> De seit hommes avait vertu,
> Un plus hardi ne fu veu."

They ranged up the Bruneswold, dashing out to the war-cry of "A Wake! A Wake!" and laying all waste with fire and sword; that is, such towns as were in the hands of Frenchmen. A noble range they must have had, for gallant sportsmen. Away south, between the Nene and Welland, stretched from Stamford and Peterborough the still vast forests of Rockingham, nigh twenty miles in length as the crow flies, down beyond Rockingham town, and Geddington Chase. To the west, they had the range of the "hunting counties," dotted still, in the more eastern part, with innumerable copses and shaughs, the remnants of the great forest, out of which, as out of Rockinghamshire, have been cut those fair parks and

> "Handsome houses,
> Where the wealthy nobles dwell;"

past which the Lord of Burghley led his Welsh bride to that Burghley House by Stamford town, well-nigh the noblest of them all, which was in Hereward's time deep wood and freestone down. Round Exton, and Normanton, and that other

Burley on the Hill; on through those Morkery woods, which still retain the name of Hereward's ill-fated nephew; north by Irnham and Corby; on to Belton and Syston (par nobile), and south-west again to those still-wooded heights, whence all-but-royal Belvoir looks out over the rich green vale below, did Hereward and his men range far and wide, harrying the Frenchman, and hunting the dun deer. Stags and fallow deer there were in plenty. There remain to this day, in Grimsthorpe Park by Bourne, the descendants of the very deer which Earl Leofric and Earl Algar, and after them Hereward the outlaw, hunted in the Bruneswold.

Deep tangled forest filled the lower claylands, swarming with pheasant, roe, badger, and more wolves than were needed. Broken park-like glades covered the upper freestones, where the red deer came out from harbor for their evening graze, and the partridges and plovers whirred up, and the hares loped away, innumerable; and where hollies and ferns always gave dry lying for the night. What did men need more, whose bodies were as stout as their hearts?

They were poachers and robbers — and why not? The deer had once been theirs, the game, the land, the serfs; and if Godric of Corby slew the Irnham deer, and burned Irnham hall over the head of the new French lord, and thought no harm, he did but what he would with that which had been once his own.

Easy it was to dash out by night, and make a raid; to harry the places which they once had owned themselves; in the vale of Belvoir to the west, or to the east in the strip of fertile land which sloped down into the fen; and levy blackmail in

Folkingham, or Aslackby, or Sleaford, or any other of the "Vills" (now thriving villages) which still remain in Domesday Book, and written against them the ugly and significant —

"In Tatenai habuerunt Turgisle et Suen IIII. carrucas terræ," etc. "Hoc Ivo Taillebosc ibi habet in dominio" — all, that is, that the wars had left of them.

The said Turgisle (Torkill or Turketil misspelt by Frenchmen) and Sweyn, and many a good man more — for Ivo's possessions were enormous — were thorns in the sides of Ivo and his men, which must be extracted; and the Bruneswold a nest of hornets, which must be smoked out at any cost.

Wherefore it befell, that once upon a day there came riding to Hereward in the Bruneswold a horseman all alone.

And meeting with Hereward and his men, he made signs of amity, and bowed himself low, and pulled out of his purse a letter, protesting that he was an Englishman, and a "good felawe," and that though he came from Lincoln town, a friend to the English had sent him.

That was believable enough, for Hereward had his friends, and his spies, far and wide.

And when he opened the letter, and looked first, like a wary man, at the signature, — a sudden thrill went through him.

It was Alftruda's.

If he was interested in her, considering what had passed between them from her childhood, it was nothing to be ashamed of. And yet, somehow, he felt ashamed of that same sudden thrill.

And Hereward had reason to be ashamed. He had been faithful to Torfrida — a virtue most rare

in those days. Few were faithful then, save, it may be, Baldwin of Mons to his tyrant and idol, the sorceress Richilda; and William of Normandy — whatever were his other sins — to his wise and sweet and beautiful Matilda. The stories of his coldness and cruelty to her seem to rest on no foundation. One need believe them as little as one does the myth of one chronicler, that when she tried to stop him from some expedition, and clung to him as he sat upon his horse, he smote his spur so deep into her breast that she fell dead. The man had self-control, and feared God, in his own wild way: therefore it was, perhaps, that he conquered.

And Hereward had been faithful likewise to Torfrida, and loved her with an overwhelming adoration, — as all true men love. And for that very reason he was the more aware that his feeling for Alftruda was strangely like his feeling for Torfrida; and yet strangely different.

There was nothing in the letter that he should not have read. She called him her best and dearest friend, twice the savior of her life. What could she do in return, but, at any risk to herself, try and save his life? The French were upon him. The posse cómitatus of seven counties was raising. "Northampton, Cambridge, Lincoln, Holland, Leicester, Huntingdon, Warwick," were coming to the Bruneswold to root him out.

"Lincoln?" thought Hereward. "That must be Gilbert of Ghent, and Oger the Breton. No! Gilbert is not coming; Sir Ascelin is coming for him. Holland? That is my friend Ivo Taillebois. Well, we shall have the chance of paying off old scores. Northampton? The earl thereof just

now is the pious and loyal Waltheof, as he is of Huntingdon and Cambridge. Is he going to join young Fitz-Osbern from Warwick and Leicester, to root out the last Englishman? Why not? That would be a deed worthy of the man who married Judith, and believes in the powers that be, and eats dirt daily at William's table."

Then he read on.

Ascelin had been mentioned, he remarked, three or four times in the letter, which was long, as from one lingering over the paper, wishing to say more than she dared. At the end was a hint of the reason:

"Oh, that having saved me twice, you could save me once more. Know you that Gospatric has been driven from his earldom on charge of treason, and that Waltheof has Northumbria in his place, as well as the parts round you? And that Gospatric is fled to Scotland again, with his sons — my man among them? And now the report comes, that my man is slain in battle on the Border; and that I am to be given away — as I have been given away twice before — to Ascelin. This I know, as I know all, not only from him of Ghent, but from him of Peterborough, Ascelin's uncle."

Hereward laughed a laugh of cynical triumph, — pardonable enough in a broken man.

"Gospatric! the wittol! the woodcock! looking at the springe, and then coolly putting his head therein. Throwing the hatchet after the helve; selling his soul, and never getting the price of it! I foresaw it, foretold it, I believe to Alftruda herself, — foretold that he would not keep his bought earldom three years. What a people we are, we English, if Gospatric is — as he is — the shrewdest

man among us, with a taint of canny Scots blood too. 'Among the blind, the one-eyed is king,' says Torfrida, out of her wise ancients, and blind we are, if he is not best. No. There is one better man left, I trust: one that will never be sleepy enough to put his head into the wolf's mouth, and trust the Frenchman, and that is, I the Wake."

And Hereward mused to himself at Gospatric's expense, of his own superior wisdom, till his eye caught a line or two which finished the letter.

"Oh, that you would change your mind, much as I honour you for it. Oh, that you would come in to the king, who loves and trusts you, having seen your constancy and faith, proved by so many years of affliction. Great things are open to you, and great joys: — I dare not tell you what: but I know them, if you would come in. You, to waste yourself in the forest, an outlaw and a savage! Opportunity once lost, never returns: time flies fast, Hereward my friend, and we shall all grow old. — I think at times that I shall soon grow old. And the joys of life will be impossible, and nothing left but vain regrets."

"Hey?" said Hereward, "a very clerkly letter. I did not think she was so good a scholar. Almost as good a one as Torfrida."

That was all he said: and as for thinking, he had the posse comitatus of seven counties to think of. But what could those great fortunes and joys be, which Alfruda did not dare to describe?

She growing old, too? Impossible: that was woman's vanity. It was but two years since she was as fair as a saint in a window. "She shall not marry Ascelin. I will cut his head off. She shall have her own choice for once, poor child."

And Hereward found himself worked up to a great height of paternal solicitude for Alftruda, and righteous indignation against Ascelin. He did not confess to himself that he disliked much, in his selfish vanity, the notion of Alftruda's marrying any one at all. He did not want to marry her himself, — of course not. But there is no dog in the manger so churlish on such points as a vain man. There are those who will not willingly let their own sisters, their own daughters, their own servants marry. Why should a woman wish to marry any one but them?

But Hereward, however vain, was no dreamer or sluggard. He set to work, joyfully, cheerfully, scenting battle afar off, like Job's war-horse, and pawing for the battle. He sent back Alftruda's messenger, with this answer:

"Tell your lady that I kiss her hands and feet. That I cannot write, for outlaws carry no pen and ink. But that what she has commanded, that will I perform."

It is noteworthy, that when Hereward showed Torfrida (which he did frankly) Alftruda's letter, he did not tell her the exact words of his answer, and stumbled and varied much, vexing her thereby, when she, naturally, wished to hear them word for word.

Then he sent out spies to the four airts of heaven. And his spies, finding a friend and a meal in every hovel, brought home all the news he needed.

He withdrew Torfrida and his men into the heart of the forest, — no hint of the place is given by the chronicler, — cut down trees, formed an abattis of trunks and branches, and awaited the enemy.

CHAPTER XXXV

HOW ABBOT THOROLD WAS PUT TO RANSOM

THOUGH Hereward had, as yet, no feud against "bysshoppes and archbysshoppes," save Egelsin of Selsey, who had excommunicated him, but who was at the other end of England, he had feud, as may be supposed, against Thorold, Abbot of Peterborough; and Thorold feud likewise against him. When Thorold had entered the "Golden Borough," hoping to fatten himself with all its treasures, he had found it a smoking ruin, and its treasures gone to Ely to pay Sweyn and his Danes. And such a sacrilege, especially when he was the loser thereby, was the unpardonable sin itself in the eyes of Thorold, as he hoped it might be in the eyes of St. Peter. Joyfully therefore he joined his friend Ivo Taillebois, when, "with his usual pompous verbosity," saith Peter of Blois, writing on this very matter, he asked him to join in destroying Hereward.

Nevertheless, with all the French chivalry at their back, it behoved them to move with caution; for (so says the chronicler) "Hereward had in these days very many foreigners, as well as landsfolk, who had come to him to practise and learn war, and fled from their masters and friends when they heard of his fame; some of them even the king's courtiers, who had come to see whether those

things which they heard were true, whom Hereward nevertheless received cautiously, on plighted troth and oath."

So Ivo Taillebois summoned all his men, and all other men's men who would join him, and rode forth through Spalding and Bourne, having announced to Lucia, his bride, that he was going to slay her one remaining relative; and when she wept, cursed and kicked her, as he did once a week. After which he came to Thorold of Peterborough.

So on the two worthies rode from Peterborough to Stamford, and from Stamford into the wilderness, no man knows whither.

> "And far they rode by bush and shaugh,
> And far by moss and mire:"

but never found a track of the Wake or his men. And Ivo Taillebois left off boasting how he would burn Torfrida over a slow fire, and confined himself to cursing; and Abbot Thorold left off warbling the song of Roland as if he had been going to a second battle of Hastings, and wished himself in warm bed at Peterborough.

But at the last they struck upon a great horse-track, and followed it at their best pace for several miles; and yet no sign of Hereward.

"Catch an Englishman," quoth the abbot.

But that was not so easy. The poor folk had hidden themselves, like Israel of old, in thickets and dens, and caves of rocks, at the far-off sight of the foreign tyrants; and not a living soul had appeared for twenty miles. At last they caught a ragged wretch, herding swine, and haled him up to Ivo.

"Have you seen Hereward, villain?" asked he, through an interpreter.

"Nay."

"You lie. These are his fresh horse-tracks, and you must have seen him pass."

"Eh?"

"Thrust out one of his eyes, and he will find his tongue."

It was done.

"Will you answer now?"

The poor wretch only howled.

"Thrust out the other."

"No, not that! Mercy: I will tell. He has gone by this four hours. How have you not met him?"

"Fool! The hoofs point onward there."

"Ay"—and the fellow could hardly hide a grin—"but he had shod all his horses backwards."

A storm of execration followed. They might be thrown twenty miles out of their right road by the stratagem.

"So you had seen Hereward, and would not tell? Put out his other eye," said Taillebois, as a vent to his own feelings.

And they turned their horses' heads, and rode back, leaving the man blind in the forest.

The day was waning now. The fog hung heavy on the tree-tops, and dripped upon their heads. The horses were getting tired, and slipped and tumbled in the deep clay paths. The footmen were more tired still, and, cold and hungry, straggled more and more. The horse-tracks led over an open lawn of grass and fern, with here and there an ancient thorn, and round it on three sides thick wood of oak and beech, with under copse of holly and hazel. Into that wood the horse-tracks led, by

a path on which there was but room for one horse at a time.

"Here they are at last!" cried Ivo. "I see the fresh footmarks of men, as well as horses. Push on, knights and men-at-arms."

The abbot looked at the dark, dripping wood, and meditated.

"I think that it will be as well for some of us to remain here, and, spreading our men along the woodside, prevent the escape of the villains. A moi, hommes d'armes!"

"As you like. I will go in, and bolt the rabbit; and you shall snap him as he comes out."

And Ivo, who was as brave as a bull-dog, thrust his horse into the path, while the abbot sat shivering outside. "Certain nobles of higher rank," says Peter de Blois, "followed his example, not wishing to rust their armor, or tear their fine clothes, in the damp copse."

The knights and men-at-arms straggled slowly into the forest, some by the path, some elsewhere, grumbling audibly at the black work before them. At last the crashing of the branches died away, and all was still.

Abbot Thorold sat there upon his shivering horse, shivering himself as the cold pierced through his wet mail; and as near an hour passed, and no sign of foe or friend appeared, he cursed the hour in which he took off the beautiful garments of the sanctuary to endure those of the battlefield. He thought of a warm chamber, warm bath, warm footcloths, warm pheasant, and warm wine. He kicked his freezing iron feet in the freezing iron stirrup. He tried to blow his nose with his freezing iron hand; but dropped his handkerchief (an almost

unique luxury in those days) into the mud, and his horse trod on it. He tried to warble the song of Roland: but the words exploded in a cough and a sneeze. And so dragged on the weary hours, says the chronicler, nearly all day, till the ninth hour. But never did they see coming out of the forest, the men who had gone in.

A shout from his nephew, Sir Ascelin, made all turn their heads. Behind them, on the open lawn, in the throat between the woods by which they had entered, were some forty knights, galloping towards them.

"Ivo?"

"No!" almost shrieked the abbot. "There is the Wake banner. It is Hereward."

"There is Winter on his left," cried one. "And there, with the standard, is the accursed monk, Ranald of Ramsey."

And on they came, having debouched from the wood some two hundred yards off, behind a roll in the lawn, just far enough off to charge as soon as they were in line.

On they came, two deep, with lances high over their shoulders, heads and heels well down, while the green tufts flew behind them. "A moi, hommes d'armes!" shouted the abbot. But too late. The French turned right and left. To form was impossible, ere the human whirlwind would be upon them.

Another half-minute, and with a shout of "A Wake! A Wake!" they were struck, ridden through, hurled over, and trampled in the mud.

"I yield. Grace! I yield!" cried Thorold, struggling from under his horse: but there was no one to whom to yield. The knights' backs were



With a shout of "A Wake! A Wake!"

fifty yards off, their right arms high in the air, striking and stabbing.

The battle was à l'outrance. There was no quarter given that day.

> "And he that came live out thereof
> Was he that ran away."

The abbot tried to make for the wood: but ere he could gain it, the knights had turned, and one rode straight at him, throwing away a broken lance, and drawing his sword.

Abbot Thorold may not have been the coward which Peter of Blois would have him, over and above being the bully which all men would have him; but if so, even a worm will turn; and so did the abbot: he drew sword from thigh, got well under his shield, his left foot forward, and struck one blow for his life, at the right place — his foe's bare knee.

But he had to do with a warier man than himself. There was a quick jerk of the rein; the horse swerved round right upon him, and knocked him head over heels; while his blow went into empty air.

"Yield, or die!" cried the knight, leaping from his horse, and kneeling on his head.

"I am a man of God, an abbot, churchman, Thorold."

"Man of all the devils!" and the knight lugged him up, and bound his arms behind him with the abbot's own belt.

"Ahoi! Here! I have caught a fish. I have got the Golden Borough in my purse!" roared he. "How much has St. Peter gained since we borrowed of him last, abbot? He will have to pay

out the silver pennies bonnily, if he wishes to get back thee."

"Blaspheme not, godless barbarian!" Whereat the knight kicked him.

"And you have Thorold the scoundrel, Winter?" cried Hereward, galloping up. "And we have three or more dainty French knights, and a viscount of I know not where among them. This is a good day's work. Now for Ivo and his tail."

And the abbot, with four or five more prisoners, were hoisted on to their own horses, tied firmly, and led away into the forest path.

"Do not leave a wounded man to die," cried a knight who lay on the lawn.

"Never we. I will come back and put you out of your pain," quoth some one.

"Siward! Siward Le Blanc! Are you in this meinie?" cried the knight in French.

"That am I. Who calls?"

"For God's sake, save him!" cried Thorold. "He is my own nephew, and I will pay ——"

"You will need all your money for yourself," said Siward the White, riding back.

"Are you Sir Ascelin of Ghent?"

"That am I, your host of old."

"I wish I had met you in better company. But friends we are, and friends must be."

And he dismounted, and did his best for the wounded man, promising him to return and fetch him off before night, or send yeomen to do so.

As he pushed on through the wood, the abbot began to see signs of a fight; riderless horses crashing through the copse, wounded men straggling back, to be cut down without mercy by the English. The war had been à l'outrance for a long

while. None gave or asked quarter. The knights might be kept for ransom ; they had money. The wretched men of the lower classes, who had none, were slain: as they would have slain the English.

Soon they heard the noise of battle; and saw horsemen and footmen pell-mell, tangled in an abattis, from behind which archers and crossbowmen shot them down in safety.

Hereward dashed forward with a shout, and at that the French, taken in the flank, fled, and were smitten as they fled, hip and thigh.

Hereward bade them spare a fugitive, and bring him to him.

"I give you your life; so run, and carry my message. That is Taillebois' banner there forward, is it not ?"

"Yes."

"Then go after him, and tell him, — Hereward has the Abbot of Burgh, and half-a-dozen knights, safe by the heels. And unless Ivo clears the wood of his men by nightfall, I will hang every one of them up for the crows before morning."

Ivo got the message, and having had enough fighting for the day, drew off, says the chronicler, for the sake of the abbot and his fellow-captives.

Two hours after the abbot and the other prisoners were sitting, unbound but unarmed, in the forest encampment, waiting for a right good meal ; with Torfrida bustling about them, after binding up the very few wounded amongst their own men.

Every courtesy was shown them; and their hearts were lifted up, as they beheld approaching among the trees great caldrons of good soup; forest salads; red deer and roe roasted on the woodembers; spits of pheasants and partridges, larks

and buntings, thrust off one by one by fair hands into the burdock leaves which served as platters; and last but not least, jacks of ale and wine, appearing mysteriously from a cool old stone quarry. Abbot Thorold ate to his heart's content, complimented every one, vowed he would forswear all French cooks and take to the greenwood himself, and was as gracious and courtly as if he had been at the new palace at Winchester.

And all the more for this reason — that he had intended to overawe the English barbarians by his polished French manners. He found those of Hereward and Torfrida, at least, as polished as his own.

"I am glad you are content, lord abbot," said Torfrida; "I trust you prefer dining with me to burning me, as you meant to do."

"I burn such peerless beauty! I injure a form made only for the courts of kings! Heaven and all saints, knighthood and all chivalry, forbid. What Taillebois may have said, I know not! I am no more answerable for his intentions than for his parentage, — or his success this day. Let churls be churls, and woodcutters woodcutters. I at least, thanks to my ancestors, am a gentleman."

"And, as a gentleman, will of course contribute to the pleasure of your hosts. It will surely please you to gratify us with one stave at least of that song which has made you famous among all knights," holding out a harp.

"I blush: but obey. A harp in the greenwood? A court in the wilderness! What joy!"

And the vain abbot took the harp, and said: "These, if you will allow my modesty to choose, are the staves on which I especially pride myself.

The staves which Taillefer — you will pardon my mentioning him ——"

"Why pardon? A noble minstrel he was, and a brave warrior, though our foe. And often have I longed to hear him, little thinking that I should hear instead the maker himself."

So said Hereward; and the abbot sang — those wondrous staves, where Roland, left alone of all the Paladins, finds death come on him fast. And on the Pyrenæan peak, beneath the pine, he lays himself, "his face toward the ground; and under him his sword and magic horn, that Charles his lord may say, and all his folk, the gentle count he died a conqueror;" and then "turns his eyes southward toward Spain; betakes himself to remember many things; of so many lands which he conquered valiantly; of pleasant France, of the men of his lineage, of Charlemagne his lord, who brought him up. He could not help to weep and sigh, but yet himself he would not forget. He bewailed his sins, and prayed God's mercy: — True Father, who ne'er yet didst lie, who raised St. Lazarus from death, and guarded Daniel from the lions: Guard my soul from all perils, for the sins which in my life I did. His right glove then he offered to God; St. Gabriel took it from his hand; On his arm the chief bowed down, with joined hands he went unto his end. God sent down his angel Cherubim, and St. Michael whom men call 'del peril.' Together with them St. Gabriel he came; the soul of the count they bore to Paradise."

And the abbot ended, sadly and gently, without that wild "Aoi!" the war-cry with which he usually ends his staves. And the wild men of the woods

were softened and saddened by the melody; and as many as understood French said, when he finished, "Amen! so may all good knights die!"

"Thou art a great maker, abbot! They told truths of thee. Sing us more of thy great courtesy."

And he sang them the staves of the Olifant, the magic horn — How Roland would not sound it in his pride, and sounded it at Turpin's bidding, but too late; and how his temples burst with that great blast, and Charles and all his peers heard it through the gorges, leagues away in France. And then his "Aoi!" rang forth so loud and clear, like any trumpet blast, under the oaken glades, that the wild men leaped to their feet, and shouted "Health to the gleeman! Health to the Abbot Thorold!"

"I have won them," thought the abbot to himself. Strange mixture that man must have been, if all which is told of him is true; a very typical Norman, compact of cunning and ferocity, chivalry and poetry, vanity and superstition, and yet able enough to help to conquer England for the Pope.

Then he pressed Hereward to sing, with many compliments; and Hereward sang, and sang again, and all his men crowded round him as the outlaws of Judæa may have crowded round David in Carmel or Hebron, to hear, like children, old ditties which they loved the better the oftener they heard them.

"No wonder that you can keep these knights together, if you can charm them thus with song. Would that I could hear you singing thus in William's hall!"

"No more of that, sir abbot. The only music which I have for William is the music of steel on steel."



Hereward answered sharply, because he was half of Thorold's mind.

"Now," said Torfrida, as it grew late, "we must ask our noble guest for what he can give us as easily and well as he can song — and that is news. We hear naught here in the greenwood, and must throw oneself on the kindness of a chance visitor."

The abbot leaped at the bait, and told them news, court gossip, bringing in great folks' names and his own, as often and as familiarly mingled as he could.

"What of Richilda?" asked Torfrida.

"Ever since young Arnoul was killed at Cassel——"

"Arnoul killed?" shrieked Torfrida.

"Is it possible that you do not know?"

"How should I know, shut up in Ely for— years it seems."

"But they fought at Cassel three months before you went to Ely."

"Be it so. Only tell me. Arnoul killed!"

Then the abbot told, not without feeling, a fearful story.

Robert the Frison and Richilda had come to open war; and Gerbod the Fleming, Earl of Chester, had gone over from England to help Robert. William had sent Fitz Osbern, Earl of Hereford, the scourge and tyrant of the Welsh, to help Richilda. Fitz Osbern had married her, there and then. She had asked help of her liege lord, the King of France, and he had sent her troops. Robert and Richilda had fought on St. Peter's day, 1071 — nearly two years before, at Bavinchoven, by Cassel.

Richilda had played the heroine, and routed Robert's left wing, taken him prisoner, and sent him off to St. Omer. Men said that she had done it by her enchantments. But her enchantments betrayed her nevertheless. Fitz Osbern, her bridegroom, fell dead. Young Arnoul had two horses killed under him. Then Gerbod smote him to the ground; and Richilda and her troops fled in horror. Richilda was taken, and exchanged for the Frison; at which the King of France, being enraged, had come down and burnt St. Omer. Then Richilda, undaunted, had raised fresh troops to avenge her son. Then Robert had met them at Broqueroie by Mons, and smote them with a dreadful slaughter.[1] Then Richilda had turned and fled wildly into a convent; and, so men said, tortured herself night and day with fearful penances, if by any means she might atone for her great sins.

Torfrida heard, and laid her head upon her knees, and wept so bitterly that the abbot entreated pardon for having pained her so much.

The news had a deep and lasting effect on her. The thought of Richilda shivering and starving in the squalid darkness of a convent, abode by her thenceforth. Should she ever find herself atoning in like wise for her sorceries — harmless as they had been; for her ambitions — just as they had been; for her crimes? But she had committed none. No, she had sinned in many things: but she was not as Richilda. And yet in the loneliness and sadness of the forest, she could not put Richilda from before the eyes of her mind.

It saddened Hereward likewise. For Richilda

[1] The place was called till late, and may be now, "The Hedges of Death."

he cared little. But that boy. — How he had loved him! How he had taught him to ride, and sing, and joust, and handle sword, and all the art of war. How his own rough soul had been the better for that love. How he had looked forward to the day when Arnoul should be a great prince, and requite him with love. Now he was gone. Gone? Who was not gone, or going? He seemed to himself the last tree in the forest. When should his time come, and the lightning strike him down to rot beside the rest? But he tossed the sad thoughts aside. He could not afford to nourish them. It was his only chance of life, to be merry and desperate.

"Well!" said Hereward, ere they happed themselves up for the night. "We owe you thanks, Abbot Thorold, for an evening worthy of a king's court rather than a holly bush."

"I have won him over," thought the abbot.

"So charming a courtier — so sweet a minstrel — so agreeable a newsmonger — could I keep you in a cage forever, and hang you on a bough, I were but too happy: but you are too fine a bird to sing in captivity. So you must go, I fear, and leave us to the nightingales. And I will take for your ransom ——"

Abbot Thorold's heart beat high.

"Thirty thousand silver marks."

"Thirty thousand fiends!"

"My beau sire, will you undervalue yourself? Will you degrade yourself? I took Abbot Thorold, from his talk, to be a man who set even a higher value on himself than other men set on him. What higher compliment can I pay to your vast worth, than making your ransom high accordingly,

after the spirit of our ancient English laws? Take it as it is meant, beau sire; be proud to pay the money; and we will throw you Sir Ascelin into the bargain, as he seems a friend of Siward's."

Thorold hoped that Hereward was drunk, and might forget, or relent: but he was so sore at heart that he slept not a wink that night.

But in the morning he found, to his sorrow, that Hereward had been as sober as himself.

In fine, he had to pay the money; and was a poor man all his days.

"Aha! Sir Ascelin," said Hereward apart, as he bade them all farewell with many courtesies. "I think I have put a spoke in your wheel about the fair Alftruda."

"Eh? How? Most courteous victor?"

"Sir Ascelin is not a very wealthy gentleman."

Ascelin laughed assent.

"Nudus intravi, nudus exeo — England; and I fear now, this mortal life likewise."

"But he looked to his rich uncle the abbot, to further a certain marriage-project of his. And of course neither my friend Gilbert of Ghent, nor my enemy William of Normandy, is likely to give away so rich an heiress without some gratification in return."

"Sir Hereward knows the world, it seems."

"So he has been told before. And therefore, having no intention that Sir Ascelin — however worthy of any and every fair lady — should marry this one, he took care to cut off the stream at the fountain head. If he hears that the suit is still pushed, he may cut off another head beside the fountain's."

"There will be no need," said Ascelin, laughing

again. "You have very sufficiently ruined my uncle and my hopes."

"My head?" said he, as soon as Hereward was out of hearing. "If I do not cut off thy head ere all is over, there is neither luck nor craft left among Frenchmen. I shall catch the Wake sleeping some day, let him be never so Wakeful."

CHAPTER XXXVI

HOW ALFTRUDA WROTE TO HEREWARD

THE weary months ran on, from summer into winter, and winter into summer again, for two years and more, and neither Torfrida nor Hereward was the better for them. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; and a sick heart is but too apt to be a peevish one. So there were fits of despondency, jars, mutual recriminations. "If I had not taken your advice, I should not have been here." "If I had not loved you so well, I might have been very differently off." And so forth. The words were wiped away the next hour, perhaps the next minute, by sacred kisses: but they had been said, and would be recollected and perhaps said again.

Then, again, the "merry greenwood" was merry enough in the summer tide, when shaughs were green, and

> "The woodwele sang, and would not cease,
> Sitting upon the spray,
> So loud, it wakened Robin Hood
> In the greenwood where he lay."

But it was a sad place enough, when the autumn fog crawled round the gorse, and dripped off the hollies, and choked alike the breath and the eye-

sight; when the air sickened with the graveyard smell of rotting leaves, and the rain-water stood in the clay holes over the poached and sloppy lawns.

It was merry enough, too, when they were in winter quarters in friendly farm-houses, as long as the bright sharp frosts lasted, and they tracked the hares and deer merrily over the frozen snows: but it was doleful enough in those same farm-houses in the howling wet weather, when wind and rain lashed in through the unglazed window and ill-made roof, and there were coughs and colds and rheumatisms, and Torfrida ached from head to foot, and once could not stand upright for a whole month together, and every cranny was stuffed up with bits of board and rags, keeping out light and air as well as wind and water; and there was little difference between the short day and the long night; and the men gambled and wrangled amid clouds of peat reek, over draught-boards and chess-men which they had carved for themselves, and Torfrida sat stitching and sewing, making and mending, her eyes bleared with peat smoke, her hands sore and coarse from continued labor, her cheek bronzed, her face thin and hollow, and all her beauty worn away for very trouble. Then sometimes there was not enough to eat, and every one grumbled at her; or some one's clothes were not mended, and she was grumbled at again. And sometimes a foraging party brought home liquor, and all who could, got drunk to drive dull care away; and Hereward, forgetful of all her warnings, got more than was good for him likewise; and at night she coiled herself up in her furs, cold and contemptuous; and Hereward coiled himself up, guilty and defiant, and woke her again and again

with startings and wild words in his sleep. And she felt that her beauty was gone, and that he saw it; and she fancied him (perhaps it was only fancy) less tender than of yore; and then in very pride disdained to take any care of her person, and said to herself, though she dare not say it to him, that if he only loved her for her face, he did not love her at all. And because she fancied him cold at times, she was cold likewise, and grew less and less caressing, when for his sake, as well as her own, she should have grown more so day by day.

Alas! for them. There are many excuses. Sorrow may be a softening medicine at last, but at first it is apt to be a hardening one; and that savage outlaw life which they were leading can never have been a wholesome one for any soul of man, and its graces must have existed only in the brains of harpers and gleemen. Away from law, from self-restraint, from refinement, from elegance, from the very sound of a church-going bell, they were sinking gradually down to the level of the coarse men and women whom they saw; the worse and not the better parts of both their characters were getting the upper hand; and it was but too possible that after a while the hero might sink into the ruffian, the lady into a slattern and a shrew.

But in justice to them be it said, that neither of them had complained of the other to any living soul. Their love had been as yet too perfect, too sacred, for them to confess to another (and thereby confess to themselves) that it could in any wise fail. They had each idolized the other, and been too proud of their idolatry to allow that their idol could crumble or decay.

And yet at last that point too was reached.



One day they were wrangling about somewhat, as they too often wrangled, and Hereward in his temper let fall the words, "As I said to Winter the other day, you grow harder and harder upon me."

Torfrida started and fixed on him wide, terrible, scornful eyes. "So you complain of me to your boon companions?"

And she turned and went away without a word. A gulf had opened between them. They hardly spoke to each other for a week.

Hereward complained of Torfrida? What if Torfrida should complain of Hereward? But to whom? Not to the coarse women round her! her pride revolted from that thought: — and yet she longed for counsel, for sympathy, — to open her heart but to one fellow-woman. She would go to the Lady Godiva at Crowland, and take counsel of her, whether there was any method (for she put it to herself) of saving Hereward; for she saw but too clearly that he was fast forgetting all her teaching, and falling back to a point lower than that even from which she had raised him up.

To go to Crowland was not difficult. It was midwinter. The dykes were all frozen. Hereward was out foraging in the Lincolnshire wolds. So Torfrida, taking advantage of his absence, proposed another foraging party to Crowland itself. She wanted stuff for clothes, needles, thread, what not. A dozen stout fellows volunteered at once to take her. The friendly monks of Crowland would feast them royally, and send them home heaped with all manner of good things; while as for meeting Ivo Taillebois' men, if they had but three to one against them, there was a fair chance of killing a few, and carrying off their clothes and weapons,

which would be useful. So they made a sledge, tied beef bones underneath it, put Torfrida and the girl thereon, well wrapped in deer and fox and badger skin, and then putting on their skates, swept them over the fen to Crowland, singing like larks along the dykes.

And Torfrida went in to Godiva, and wept upon her knees; and Godiva wept likewise, and gave her such counsel as she could — how if the woman will keep the man heroic, she must keep herself not heroic only but devout likewise; how she herself, by that one deed which had rendered her name famous then, and famous (though she never dreamt thereof) now and it may be to the end of time — had once for all, tamed, chained, and, as it were, converted the heart of her fierce young lord; and enabled her to train him in good time into the most wise, most just, most pious, of all King Edward's earls.

And Torfrida said yes, and yes, and yes, and felt in her heart that she knew all that already. Had not she too taught, entreated, softened, civilized? Had not she too spent her life upon a man, and that man a wolf's head and a landless outlaw, more utterly than Godiva could ever have spent hers on one who lived lapped in luxury and wealth and power? Torfrida had done her best; and she had failed: or at least fancied in her haste that she had failed.

What she wanted was not counsel, but love. And she clung round the Lady Godiva, till the broken and ruined widow opened all her heart to her, and took her in her arms, and fondled her as if she had been a babe. And the two women spoke few words after that, for indeed there was



nothing to be said. Only at last, "My child, my child," cried Godiva, "better for thee, body and soul, to be here with me in the house of God, than there amid evil spirits and deeds of darkness in the wild woods."

"Not a cloister, not a cloister," cried Torfrida, shuddering, and half struggling to get away.

"It is the only place, poor wilful child, the only place this side the grave, in which we wretched creatures, who to our woe are women born, can find aught of rest or peace. By us sin came into the world, and Eve's curse lies heavy on us to this day, and our desire is to our lords, and they rule over us; and when the slave can work for her master no more, what better than to crawl into the house of God, and lay down our crosses at the foot of His cross, and die? You too will come here, Torfrida, some day, I know it well. You too will come here to rest."

"Never, never," shrieked Torfrida, "never to these horrid vaults. I will die in the fresh air. I will be buried under the green hollies; and the nightingales, as they wander up from my own Provence, shall build and sing over my grave. Never, never!" murmured she to herself all the more eagerly, because something within her said that it would come to pass.

The two women went into the church to matins, and prayed long and fervently. And at the early daybreak, the party went back laden with good things and hearty blessings, and caught one of Ivo Taillebois' men by the way, and slew him, and got off him a new suit of clothes in which the poor fellow was going courting; and so they got home safe into the Bruneswold.

But Torfrida had not found rest unto her soul. For the first time in her life since she became the bride of Hereward, she had had a confidence concerning him and unknown to him. It was to his own mother — true. And yet she felt as if she had betrayed him: but then had he not betrayed her? And to Winter of all men?

It might have been two months afterwards that Martin Lightfoot put a letter into Torfrida's hand.

The letter was addressed to Hereward: but there was nothing strange in Martin's bringing it to his mistress. Ever since their marriage, she had opened and generally answered the very few epistles with which her husband was troubled.

She was going to open this one as a matter of course, when glancing at the superscription she saw, or fancied she saw, that it was in a woman's hand. She looked at it again. It was sealed plainly with a woman's seal; and she looked up at Martin Lightfoot. She had remarked as he gave her the letter a sly significant look in his face.

"What dost thou know of this letter?" she inquired sharply.

"That it is from the Countess Alftruda, whosoever she may be."

A chill struck through her heart. True, Alftruda had written before, only to warn Hereward of danger to his life, — and hers. She might be writing again, only for the same purpose. But still, she did not wish that either Hereward or she should owe Alftruda their lives, or anything. They had struggled on through weal and woe without her for many a year. Let them do so without her still. That Alftruda had once loved Hereward she knew well. Why should she not?



The wonder was to her that every woman did not love him. But she had long since gauged Alftruda's character, and seen in it a persistence like her own, yet, as she proudly hoped, of a lower temper; the persistence of the base weasel, not of the noble hound: yet the creeping weasel might endure, and win, when the hound was tired out by his own gallant pace. And there was a something in the tone of Alftruda's last letter, which seemed to tell her that the weasel was still upon the scent of its game. But she was too proud to mistrust Hereward, or rather, to seem to mistrust him. And yet — how dangerous Alftruda might be as a rival, if rival she chose to be. She was up in the world now, free, rich, gay, beautiful, a favorite at Queen Matilda's court, while she ——

"How came this letter into thy hands?" asked she as carelessly as she could.

"I was in Peterborough last night," said Martin, "concerning little matters of my own, and there came to me in the street a bonny young page with smart jacket on his back, smart cap on his head, and smiles and bows, and 'You are one of Hereward's men,' quoth he. 'Say that again, young jackanapes,' said I, 'and I'll cut your tongue out,' whereat he took fright and all but cried. He was very sorry, and meant no harm, but he had a letter for my master, and he heard I was one of his men. 'Who told him that?' Well, one of the monks, he could not justly say which, or would n't, and I, thinking the letter of more importance than my own neck, ask him quietly into my friend's house. There he pulls out this and five silver pennies, and I shall have five more if I bring an answer back: but to none than Hereward must I give it. With

that I, calling my friend, who is an honest woman, and nigh as strong in the arms as I am, ask her to clap her back against the door, and pull out my axe. 'Now,' said I, 'I must know a little more about this letter. Tell me, knave, who gave it thee, or I 'll split thy skull.' The young man cries and blubbers; and says that it is the Countess Alftruda, who is staying in the monastery, and that he is her serving-man, and that it is as much as my life is worth to touch a hair of his head, and so forth, — so far so good. Then I asked him again, who told him I was my master's man? — and he confessed that it was Herluin the prior, — he that was Lady Godiva's chaplain of old, whom my master robbed of his money when he had the cell of Bourne years agone. Very well, quoth I to myself, that 's one more count on our score against Master Herluin. Then I asked him how Herluin and the Lady Alftruda came to know aught of each other? and he said that she had been questioning all about the monastery without Abbot Thorold's knowledge, for one that knew Hereward and favored him well. That was all I could get from the knave, he cried so for fright. So I took his money and his letter, warning him that if he betrayed me, there were those who would roast him alive before he was done with me. And so away over the town wall, and ran here five-and-twenty miles before breakfast, and thought it better, as you see, to give the letter to my lady first."

"You have been officious," said Torfrida, coldly. "'T is addressed to your master. Take it to him. Go."

Martin Lightfoot whistled and obeyed, while



Torfrida walked away proudly and silently with a beating heart.

Again Godiva's words came over her. Should she end in the convent of Crowland? And suspecting, fearing, imagining all sorts of baseless phantoms, she hardened her heart into a great hardness.

Martin had gone with the letter, and Torfrida never heard any more of it.

So Hereward had secrets which he would not tell to her. At last!

That, at least, was a misery which she would not confide to Lady Godiva, or to any soul on earth.

But a misery it was, such a misery as none can delineate, save those who have endured it themselves, or had it confided to them by another. And happy are they to whom neither has befallen.

She wandered out and into the wild wood, and sat down by a spring. She looked in it — her only mirror — at her wan coarse face, with wild black elf locks hanging round it, and wondered whether Alftruda, in her luxury and prosperity, was still so very beautiful. Ah, that that fountain were the fountain of Jouvence, the spring of perpetual youth, which all believed in those days to exist somewhere, — how would she plunge into it, and be young and fair once more!

No! she would not! She had lived her life, and lived it well, gallantly, lovingly, heroically. She had given that man her youth, her beauty, her wealth, her wit. He should not have them a second time. He had had his will of her. If he chose to throw her away when he had done with her, to prove himself base at last, unworthy of all her care, her counsels, her training, — dreadful

thought! To have lived to keep that man for her own, and just when her work seemed done, to lose him! No, there was worse than that. To have lived that she might make that man a perfect knight, and just when her work seemed done, to see him lose himself.

And she wept till she could weep no more. Then she washed away her tears in that well. Had it been in Greece of old, it would have become a sacred well thenceforth, and Torfrida's tears have changed into forget-me-nots, and fringed its marge with azure evermore.

Then she went back, calm, all but cold: but determined not to betray herself, let him do what he would. Perhaps it was all a mistake, a fancy. At least she would not degrade him, and herself, by showing suspicion. It would be dreadful, shameful to herself, wickedly unjust to him, to accuse him were he innocent after all.

Hereward, she remarked, was more kind to her now. But it was a kindness which she did not like. It was shy, faltering, as of a man guilty and ashamed; and she repelled it as much as she dared, and then, once or twice, returned it passionately, madly, in hopes ——

But he never spoke a word of that letter.

After a dreadful month, Martin came mysteriously to her again. She trembled, for she had remarked in him lately a strange change. He had lost his usual loquacity and quaint humor; and had fallen back into that sullen taciturnity which, so she heard, he had kept up in his youth. He, too, must know evil which he dared not tell.

"There is another letter come. It came last night," said he.



"What is that to thee or me? My lord has his state secrets. Is it for us to pry into them? Go."

"I thought — I thought ——"

"Go, I say!"

"That your ladyship might wish for a guide to Crowland."

"Crowland?" almost shrieked Torfrida, for the thought of Crowland had risen in her own wretched mind instantly and involuntarily. "Go, madman!"

Martin went. Torfrida paced madly up and down the farm-house. Then she settled herself into fierce despair.

There was a noise of trampling horses outside. The men were arming and saddling, seemingly for a raid.

Hereward hurried in for his armor. When he saw Torfrida, he blushed scarlet.

"You want your arms," said she, quietly; "let me fetch them."

"No, never mind. I can harness myself; I am going southwest, to pay Taillebois a visit. I am in a great hurry. I shall be back in three days. Then — good-bye."

He snatched his arms off a perch, and hurried out again, dragging them on. As he passed her, he offered to kiss her; she put him back, and helped him on with his armor, while he thanked her confusedly.

"He was as glad not to kiss me, after all!"

She looked after him as he stood, his hand on his horse's withers. How noble he looked! And a great yearning came over her. To throw her arms round his neck once, and then to stab herself, and set him free, dying, as she had lived, for him.

Two bonny boys were wrestling on the lawn,

young outlaws who had grown up in the forest with ruddy cheeks and iron limbs.

"Ah, Winter!" she heard him say, "had I had such a boy as that! ——"

She heard no more. She turned away, her heart dead within her. She knew all that those words implied, in days when the possession of land was everything to the free man; and the possession of a son necessary, to pass that land on in the ancestral line. Only to have a son; only to prevent the old estate passing, with an heiress, into the hands of strangers, what crimes did not men commit in those days, and find themselves excused for them in public opinion? And now, her other children (if she ever had any) had died in childhood; the little Torfrida, named after herself, was all that she had brought to Hereward; and he was the last of his house. In him the race of Leofric, of Godiva, of Earl Oslac, would become extinct; and that girl would marry — whom? Whom but some French conqueror, or at best some English outlaw? In either case Hereward would have no descendants for whom it was worth his while to labor or to fight. What wonder if he longed for a son — and not a son of hers, the barren tree — to pass his name down to future generations? It might be worth while, for that, to come in to the king, to recover his lands, to —— She saw it all now, and her heart was dead within her.

She spent that evening, neither eating nor drinking, but sitting over the log embers, her head upon her hands, and thinking over all her past life and love, since she saw him, from the gable window, ride the first time into St. Omer. She went through it all, with a certain stern delight in the



self-torture, deliberately day by day, year by year, — all its lofty aspirations, all its blissful passages, all its deep disappointments, and found in it — so she chose to fancy in the wilfulness of her misery — nothing but cause for remorse. Self in all, vanity, and vexation of spirit; for herself she had loved him; for herself she had tried to raise him; for herself she had set her heart on man, and not on God. She had sown the wind: and behold, she had reaped the whirlwind. She could not repent, she could not pray. But oh! that she could die.

She was unjust to herself, in her great nobleness. It was not true, not half, not a tenth part true. But perhaps it was good for her that it should seem true for that moment; that she should be emptied of all earthly things for once, if so she might be filled from above.

At last she went into the inner room to lie down and try to sleep. At her feet, under the perch where Hereward's armor had hung, lay an open letter.

She picked it up, surprised at seeing such a thing there, and kneeling down, held it eagerly to the wax candle which was on a spike at the bed's head.

She knew the handwriting in a moment. It was Alftruda's.

This, then, was why Hereward had been so strangely hurried. He must have had that letter and dropped it.

Her mind and eye took it all in in one instant, as the lightning flash reveals a whole landscape. And then her mind became as dark as that landscape when the flash is past.

It congratulated Hereward on having shaken himself free from the fascinations of that sorceress. It said that all was settled with King William. Hereward was to come to Winchester. She had the king's writ for his safety ready to send to him. The king would receive him as his liegeman. Alftruda would receive him as her husband. Archbishop Lanfranc had made difficulties about the dissolution of the marriage with Torfrida: but gold would do all things at Rome; and Lanfranc was her very good friend, and a reasonable man — and so forth.

Men, and beasts likewise, when stricken with a mortal wound, will run, and run on, blindly, aimless, impelled by the mere instinct of escape from intolerable agony. And so did Torfrida. Half undressed as she was, she fled forth into the forest, she knew not whither, running as one does wrapped in fire: but the fire was not without her, but within.

She cast a passing glance at the girl who lay by her, sleeping a pure and gentle sleep ——

"Oh that thou hadst but been a boy!" Then she thought no more of her, not even of Hereward: but all of which she was conscious was a breast and brain bursting; an intolerable choking, from which she must escape.

She ran, and ran on, for miles. She knew not whether the night was light or dark, warm or cold. Her tender feet might have been ankle deep in snow. The branches over her head might have been howling in the tempest, or dripping with rain. She knew not, and heeded not. The owls hooted to each other under the staring moon, but she heard them not. The wolves glared at her from the brakes, and slunk off appalled at the white



ghostly figure : but she saw them not. The deer stood at gaze in the glades till she was close upon them, and then bounded into the wood. She ran right at them, past them, heedless. She had but one thought. To flee from the agony of a soul alone in the universe with its own misery.

At last she was aware of a man close beside her. He had been following her a long way, she recollected now: but she had not feared him, even heeded him. But when he laid his hand upon her arm, she turned fiercely, but without dread.

She looked to see if it was Hereward. To meet him would be death. If it were not he she cared not who it was. It was not Hereward ; and she cried angrily, "Off! Off!" and hurried on.

"But you are going the wrong way! The wrong way!" said the voice of Martin Lightfoot.

"The wrong way! Fool, which is the right way for me, save the path which leads to a land where all is forgotten?"

"To Crowland! To Crowland! To the minster! To the monks! That is the only right way for poor wretches in a world like this. The Lady Godiva told you you must go to Crowland. And now you are going. I too, I ran away from a monastery when I was young; and now I am going back. Come along!"

"You are right! Crowland, Crowland; and a nun's cell till death. Which is the way, Martin?"

"Oh, a wise lady! A reasonable lady! But you will be cold before you get thither. There will be a frost ere morn. So when I saw you run out, I caught up something to put over you."

Torfrida shuddered, as Martin wrapped her in the white bear-skin.

"No! Not that! Anything but that!" and she struggled to shake it off.

"Then you will be dead ere dawn. Folks that run wild in the forest thus, for but one night, die."

"Would God I could die!"

"That shall be as He wills: you do not die while Martin can keep you alive. Why, you are staggering already."

Martin caught her up in his arms, threw her over his shoulder as if she had been a child, and hurried on, in the strength of madness.

At last he stopped at a cottage door, set her down upon the turf, and knocked loudly.

"Grimkel Tolison! Grimkel, I say!"

And Martin burst the door open with his foot.

"Give me a horse, on your life," said he to the man inside. "I am Martin, the Wake's man, upon my master's business."

"What is mine is the Wake's, God bless him," said the man, struggling into a garment, and hurrying out to the shed.

"There is a ghost against the gate!" cried he, recoiling.

"That is my matter, not yours. Get me a horse to put the ghost upon."

Torfrida lay against the gate-post, exhausted now, but quite unable to think. Martin lifted her on to the beast, and led her onward, holding her up again and again.

"You are tired. You had run four miles before I could make you hear me."

"Would I had run four thousand!" And she relapsed into stupor.

They passed out of the forest, across open wolds, and at last down to the river. Martin knew of a



boat there. He lifted her from the horse, turned him loose, put Torfrida into the boat, and took the oars.

She looked up and saw the roofs of Bourne shining white in the moonlight.

And then she lifted up her voice, and shrieked three times,

"Lost! Lost! Lost!"

with such a dreadful cry, that the starlings whirred up from the reeds, and the wild-fowl rose clanging off the meres, and the watch-dogs in Bourne and Mainthorpe barked and howled, and folk told fearfully next morning, how a white ghost had gone down from the forest to the fen, and wakened them with its unearthly scream.

The sun was high when they came to Crowland minster. Torfrida had neither spoken nor stirred; and Martin, who in the midst of his madness kept a strange courtesy and delicacy, had never disturbed her, save to wrap the bear-skin more closely over her.

When they came to the bank, she rose, stepped out without his help, and drawing the bear-skin closely round her, and over her head, walked straight up to the gate of the house of nuns.

All men wondered at the white ghost: but Martin walked behind her, his left finger on his lips, his right hand grasping his little axe, with such a stern and serious face, and so fierce an eye, that all drew back in silence, and let her pass.

The portress looked through the wicket.

"I am Torfrida," said a voice of terrible calm. "I am come to see the Lady Godiva. Let me in."

The portress opened, utterly astounded.

"Madam!" said Martin eagerly, as Torfrida entered.

"What? What?" She seemed to waken from a dream. "God bless thee, thou good and faithful servant;" and she turned again.

"Madam! Say!"

"What?"

"Shall I go back, and kill him?" And he held out the little axe.

Torfrida snatched it from his grasp with a shriek, and cast it inside the convent door.

"Mother Mary and all saints!" cried the portress, "your garments are in rags, madam!"

"Never mind. Bring me garments of yours. I shall need none other till I die!" and she walked in and on.

"She is come to be a nun!" whispered the portress to the next sister, and she again to the next; and they all gabbled, and lifted up their hands and eyes, and thanked all the saints of the calendar, over the blessed and miraculous conversion of the Lady Torfrida, and the wealth which she would probably bring to the convent.

Torfrida went straight on, speaking to no one, not even to the prioress; and into Lady Godiva's chamber.

There she dropped at the countess' feet and laid her head upon her knees.

"I am come, as you always told me I should do. But it has been a long way hither, and I am very tired."

"My child! What is this? What brings you here?"

"I am doing penance for my sins."

"And your feet all cut and bleeding."

"Are they?" said Torfrida, vacantly. "I will tell you all about it when I wake."

And she fell fast asleep, with her head in Godiva's lap.

The countess did not speak or stir. She beckoned the good prioress, who had followed Torfrida in, to go away. She saw that something dreadful had happened; and prayed as she awaited the news.

Torfrida slept for a full hour. Then she awoke with a start.

"Where am I? Hereward!"

Then followed a dreadful shriek, which made every nun in that quiet house shudder, and thank God that she knew nothing of those agonies of soul which were the lot of the foolish virgins who married and were given in marriage themselves, instead of waiting with oil in their lamps for the true Bridegroom.

"I recollect all now," said Torfrida. "Listen!" And she told the countess all, with speech so calm and clear that Godiva was awed by the power and spirit of that marvellous woman.

But she groaned in bitterness of soul. "Anything but this. Rather death from him than treachery. This last, worst woe had God kept in His quiver for me, most miserable of women. And now His bolt has fallen! Hereward! Hereward! That thy mother should wish her last child laid in his grave!"

"Not so," said Torfrida, "it is well as it is. How better? It is his only chance for comfort, for honor, for life itself. He would have grown a —— I was growing bad and foul myself in that ugly wilderness. Now he will be a knight once

more among knights, and win himself fresh honor in fresh fields. Let him marry her. Why not? He can get a dispensation from the Pope, and then there will be no sin in it, you know. If the Holy Father cannot make wrong right, who can? Yes. It is very well as it is. And I am very well where I am. Women! Bring me scissors, and one of your nun's dresses. I am come to be a nun like you."

Godiva would have stopped her. But Torfrida rose upon her knees, and calmly made a solemn vow, which though canonically void without her husband's consent would, she well knew, never be disputed by any there: and as for him,—"He has lost me; and forever. Torfrida never gives herself away twice."

"There's carnal pride in those words, my poor child," said Godiva.

"Cruel!" said she, proudly. "When I am sacrificing myself utterly for him."

"And thy poor girl?"

"He will let her come hither," said Torfrida, with forced calm. "He will see that it is not fit that she should grow up with — yes, he will send her to me — to us. And I shall live for her — and for you. If you will let me be your bower-woman, dress you, serve you, read to you. You know that I am a pretty scholar. You will let me, mother? I may call you mother, may I not?" And Torfrida fondled the old woman's thin hands. "For I do want so much something to love."

"Love thy heavenly Bridegroom, the only love worthy of woman!" said Godiva, as her tears fell fast on Torfrida's head.

She gave a half-impatient toss.



"That may come, in good time. As yet it is enough to do, if I can keep down this devil here in my throat. Women, bring me the scissors."

And Torfrida cut off her raven locks, now streaked with gray; and put on the nun's dress, and became a nun thenceforth.

On the second day there came to Crowland Leofric the priest, and with him the poor child.

She had woke in the morning and found no mother. Leofric and the other men searched the woods round, far and wide. The girl mounted her horse, and would go with them. Then they took a bloodhound, and he led them to Grimkel's hut. There they heard of Martin. The ghost must have been Torfrida. Then the hound brought them to the river. And they divined at once that she was gone to Crowland, to Godiva: but why, they could not guess.

Then the girl insisted, prayed, at last commanded them to take her to Crowland. And to Crowland they came.

Leofric left the girl at the nuns' house door, and went into the monastery, where he had friends enow, runaway and renegade as he was. As he came into the great court, whom should he meet but Martin Lightfoot, in a lay brother's frock.

"Aha? And are you come home likewise? Have you renounced the devil and this last work of his?"

"What work? What devil?" asked Leofric, who saw method in Martin's madness. "And what do you here in a long frock?"

"Devil? Hereward the devil. I would have killed him with my axe: but she got it from me, and threw it in among the holy sisters, and I had

work to get it again. Shame on her, to spoil my chance of heaven. For I should surely have won heaven, you know, if I had killed the devil."

After much beating about, Leofric got from Martin the whole tragedy.

And when he heard it, he burst out weeping.

"Oh, Hereward, Hereward! Oh, knightly honor! Oh, faith and troth, and gratitude, and love in return for such love as might have tamed lions and made tyrants mild! Are they all carnal vanities, works of the weak flesh, bruised reeds which break when they are leaned upon? If so, you are right, Martin; and there is naught left, but to flee from a world in which all men are liars."

And Leofric, in the midst of Crowland Yard, tore off his belt and trusty sword, his hauberk and helm also, and letting down his monk's frock, which he wore trussed to the mid-knee, he went to the abbot's lodgings, and asked to see old Ulfketyl.

"Bring him up," said the good abbot, "for he is a valiant man and true, in spite of all his vanities; and maybe, he brings news of Hereward, whom God forgive."

And when Leofric came in, he fell upon his knees, bewailing and confessing his sinful life; and begged the abbot to take him back again into Crowland minster, and lay upon him what penance he thought fit, and put him in the lowest office because he was a man of blood; if only he might stay there, and have a sight at times of his dear Lady Torfrida, without whom he should surely die.

So Leofric was received back, in full chapter, by abbot, and prior, and all the monks. But when he



asked them to lay a penance upon him, Ulfketyl arose from his high chair, and spoke.

"Shall we, who have sat here at ease, lay a penance on this man, who has shed his blood in fifty valiant fights for us, and for St. Guthlac, and for this English land? Look at yon scars upon his head and arms. He has had sharper discipline from cold steel than we could give him here with rod; and has fasted in the wilderness more sorely, many a time, than we have fasted here."

And all the monks agreed that no penance should be laid on Leofric. Only that he should abstain from singing vain and carnal ballads, which turned the heads of the young brothers, and made them dream of naught but battles, and giants, and enchanters, and ladies' love.

Hereward came back on the third day, and found his wife and daughter gone. His guilty conscience told him in the first instance why. For he went into the chamber, and there, upon the floor, lay the letter which he had looked for in vain.

None had touched it where it lay. Perhaps no one had dared to enter the chamber. If they had, they would not have dared to meddle with writing, which they could not read, and which might contain some magic spell. Letters were very safe in those old days.

There are moods of man which no one will dare to describe unless, like Shakespeare, he is Shakespeare, and like Shakespeare knows it not.

Therefore what Hereward thought and felt will not be told. What he did, was this.

He raged and blustered. He must hide his shame. He must justify himself to his knights,

and much more to himself; or if not justify himself, must shift some of the blame over to the opposite side. So he raged and blustered. He had been robbed of his wife and daughter. They had been cajoled away by the monks of Crowland. What villains were those to rob an honest man of his family while he was fighting for his country?

So he rode down to the river, and there took two great barges, and rowed away to Crowland, with forty men-at-arms.

And all the while he thought of Alftruda, as he had seen her at Peterborough.

And of no one else?

Not so. For all the while he felt that he loved Torfrida's little finger better than Alftruda's whole body, and soul into the bargain.

What a long way it was to Crowland! How wearying were the hours through mere and ea! How wearying the monotonous pulse of the oars. If tobacco had been known then, Hereward would have smoked all the way, and been none the wiser, though the happier, for it; for the herb that drives away the evil spirits of anxiety, drives away also the good, though stern, spirits of remorse.

But in those days a man could only escape facts by drinking; and Hereward was too much afraid of what he should meet in Crowland, to go thither drunk.

Sometimes he hoped that Torfrida might hold her purpose, and set him free to follow his wicked will. All the lower nature in him, so long crushed under, leaped up chuckling and grinning and tumbling head over heels, and cried — Now I shall have a holiday!

Sometimes he hoped that Torfrida might come



out to the shore, and settle the matter in one moment, by a glance of her great hawk's eyes. If she would but quell him by one look; leap on board, seize the helm, and assume without a word the command of his men and him; steer them back to Bourne, and sit down beside him with a kiss, as if nothing had happened. If she would but do that, and ignore the past, would he not ignore it? Would he not forget Alftruda, and King William, and all the world, and go up with her into Sherwood, and then north to Scotland and Gospatric, and be a man once more?

No. He would go with her to the Baltic or the Mediterranean. Constantinople and the Varangers would be the place and the men. Ay, there to escape out of that charmed ring into a new life.

No. He did not deserve such luck; and he would not get it. She would talk it all out. She must, for she was a woman. She would blame, argue, say dreadful words — dreadful, because true and deserved. Then she would grow angry, as women do when they are most in the right, and say too much — still more dreadful words, which would be untrue and undeserved. Then he should resist, recriminate. He would not stand it. He could not stand it. No. He could never face her again.

And yet if he had seen a man insult her — if he had seen her at that moment in peril of the slightest danger, the slightest bruise, he would have rushed forward like a madman, and died, saving her from that bruise. And he knew that: and with the strange self-contradiction of human nature, he soothed his own conscience by the thought that he loved her still, and that therefore — somehow or

other, he cared not to make out how — he had done her no wrong. Then he blustered again, for the benefit of his men. He would teach these monks of Crowland a lesson. He would burn the minster over their heads.

"That would be pity, seeing they are the only Englishmen left in England," said Siward the White, his nephew, very simply.

"What is that to thee? Thou hast helped to burn Peterborough at my bidding; and thou shalt help to burn Crowland."

"I am a free gentleman of England; and what I choose, I do. I and my brother are going to Constantinople to join the Varanger guard, and shall not burn Crowland, or let any man burn it."

"Shall not let?"

"No," said the young man, so quietly that Hereward was cowed.

"I — I only meant — if they did not do right by me."

"Do right thyself," said Siward.

Hereward swore awfully, and laid his hand on his sword-hilt. But he did not draw it; for he thought he saw overhead a cloud which was very like the figure of St. Guthlac in Crowland window, and an awe fell upon him from above.

So they came to Crowland; and Hereward landed and beat upon the gates, and spoke high words. But the monks did not open the gates for a while. At last the gates creaked, and opened; and in the gateway stood Abbot Ulfketyl in his robes of state, and behind him the prior, and all the officers, and all the monks of the house.

"Comes Hereward in peace or in war?"

"In war!" said Hereward.

Then that true and trusty old man, who sealed his patriotism, if not with his blood — for the very Normans had not the heart to take that — still with long and bitter sorrows, lifted up his head, and said, like a valiant Dane, as his name bespoke him, "Against the traitor and the adulterer ——"

"I am neither," roared Hereward.

"Thou wouldst be, if thou couldst. Whoso looketh upon a woman to ——"

"Preach me no sermons, man! Let me in to seek my wife."

"Over my body," said Ulfketyl, and laid himself down across the threshold.

Hereward recoiled. If he had dared to step over that sacred body, there was not a blood-stained ruffian in his crew who dared to follow him.

"Rise, rise! for God's sake, lord abbot," said he. "Whatever I am, I need not that you should disgrace me thus. Only let me see her — reason with her."

"She has vowed herself to God, and is none of thine henceforth."

"It is against the canons. A wrong and a robbery."

Ulfketyl rose, grand as ever.

"Hereward Leofricsson, our joy and our glory once. Hearken to the old man who will soon go whither thine uncle Brand is gone, and be free of Frenchmen, and of all this wicked world. When the walls of Crowland dare not shelter the wronged woman, fleeing from man's treason to God's faithfulness, then let the roofs of Crowland burn till the flame reaches heaven, for a sign that the children of

God are as false as the children of this world, and break their faith like any belted knight."

Hereward was silenced. His men shrunk back from him. He felt as if God, and the mother of God, and St. Guthlac, and all the host of heaven, were shrinking back from him likewise. He turned to supplications, compromises — what else was left.

"At least you will let me have speech of her, or of my mother?"

"They must answer that, not I."

Hereward sent in, entreating to see one or both.

"Tell him," said Lady Godiva, "who calls himself my son, that my sons were men of honor, and that he must have been changed at nurse."

"Tell him," said Torfrida, "that I have lived my life, and am dead. Dead. If he would see me, he will only see my corpse."

"You would not slay yourself?"

"What is there that I dare not do? You do not know Torfrida. He does."

And Hereward did; and went back again like a man stunned.

After a while there came by boat to Crowland all Torfrida's wealth; clothes, jewels: not a shred had Hereward kept. The magic armor came with them.

Torfrida gave all to the abbey, there and then. Only the armor she wrapped up in the white bear's skin, and sent it back to Hereward, with her blessing, and entreaty not to refuse that, her last bequest.

Hereward did not refuse, for very shame. But for very shame he never wore that armor more. For very shame he never slept again upon the



white bear's skin on which he and his true love had lain so many a year.

And Torfrida turned herself utterly to serve the Lady Godiva, and to teach and train her child as she had never done before, while she had to love Hereward, and to work day and night, with her own fingers, for all his men. All pride, all fierceness, all care of self, had passed away from her. In penitence, humility, obedience, and gentleness, she went on: never smiling, but never weeping. Her heart was broken; and she felt it good for herself to let it break.

And Leofric the priest, and mad Martin Lightfoot, watched like two dogs for her going out and coming in; and when she went among the old corrodiers, and nursed the sick, and taught the children, and went to and fro upon her holy errands, blessing and blessed, the two wild men had a word from her mouth, or a kiss of her hand, and were happy all the day after. For they loved her with a love mightier than ever Hereward had heaped upon her; for she had given him all, but she had given those two wild men naught but the beatific vision of a noble woman.

CHAPTER XXXVII

HOW HEREWARD LOST SWORD BRAINBITER

"ON account of which," says the chronicler, "many troubles came to Hereward: because Torfrida was most wise, and of great counsel in need. For afterwards, as he himself confessed, things went not so well with him as they did in her time."

And the first thing that went ill was this. He was riding through the Bruneswold, and behind him Gery, Wenoch, and Matelgar, these three. And there met him in an open glade a knight, the biggest man he had ever seen, on the biggest horse, and five knights behind him. He was an Englishman, and not a Frenchman, by his dress; and Hereward spoke courteously enough to him. But who he was, and what his business was in the Bruneswold, Hereward thought that he had a right to ask.

"Tell me who thou art who askest, before I tell thee who I am who am asked, riding here on common land," quoth the knight, surlily enough.

"I am Hereward, without whose leave no man has ridden the Bruneswold for many a day."

"And I am Letwold the Englishman, who rides whither he will in merry England, without care for any Frenchman upon earth."

"Frenchman? Why callest thou me Frenchman, man? I am Hereward."



"Then thou art, if tales be true, as French as Ivo Taillebois. I hear that thou hast left thy true lady, like a fool and a churl, and goest to London, or Winchester, or the nether pit — I care not which — to make thy peace with the Mamzer."

The man was a surly brute: but what he said was so true, that Hereward's wrath arose. He had promised Torfrida many a time never to quarrel with an Englishman, but to endure all things. Now, out of very spite to Torfrida's counsel, because it was Torfrida's, and he had promised to obey it, he took up the quarrel.

"If I am a fool and a churl, thou art a greater fool, to provoke thine own death; and a greater ——"

"Spare your breath," said the big man, "and let me try Hereward, as I have many another."

Whereon they dropped their lance-points, and rode at each other like two mad bulls. And, by the contagion of folly common in the middle age, at each other rode Hereward's three knights and Letwold's five. The two leaders found themselves both rolling on the ground; jumped up, drew their swords, and hewed away at each other. Gery unhorsed his man at the first charge, and left him stunned. Then he turned on another, and did the same by him. Wenoch and Matelgar each overthrew their man. The fifth of Letwold's knights threw up his lance-point, not liking his new company. Gery and the other two rode in on the two chiefs, who were fighting hard, each under shield.

"Stand back!" roared Hereward, "and give the knight fair play! When did any one of us want a man to help him? Kill or die single has been our rule, and shall be."

They threw up their lance-points, and stood round to see that great fight. Letwold's knight rode in among them, and stood likewise; and friend and foe looked on, as they might at a pair of gamecocks.

Hereward had, to his own surprise and that of his fellows, met his match. The sparks flew, the iron clanged: but so heavy were the stranger's strokes, that Hereward reeled again and again. So sure was the guard of his shield, that Hereward could not wound him, hit where he would. At last he dealt a furious blow on the stranger's head.

"If that does not bring your master down!" quoth Gery. "By ——, Brainbiter is gone!"

It was too true. Sword Brainbiter's end was come. The ogre's magic blade had snapped off short by the hilt.

"Your master is a true Englishman, by the hardness of his brains," quoth Wenoch, as the stranger, reeling for a moment, lifted up his head, and stared at Hereward in the face, doubtful what to do.

"Will you yield, or fight on?" cried he.

"Yield?" shouted Hereward, rushing upon him, as a mastiff might on a lion, and striking at his helm, though shorter than he by a head and shoulders, such swift and terrible blows with the broken hilt, as staggered the tall stranger.

"What are you at, forgetting what you have at your side?" roared Gery.

Hereward sprang back. He had, as was his custom, a second sword on his right thigh.

"I forget everything now," said he to himself, angrily.



And that was too true. But he drew the second sword, and sprang at his man once more.

The stranger tried, according to the chronicler, who probably had it from one of the three by-standers, a blow which has cost many a brave man his life. He struck right down on Hereward's head. Hereward raised his shield, warding the stroke, and threw in that coup de jarret, which there is no guarding, after the downright blow has been given. The stranger dropped upon his wounded knee.

"Yield," cried Hereward, in his turn.

"That is not my fashion." And the stranger fought on upon his stumps, like Witherington in Chevy Chase.

Hereward, mad with the sight of blood, struck at him four or five times. The stranger's guard was so quick that he could not hit him, even on his knee. He held his hand, and drew back, looking at his new rival.

"What the murrain are we two fighting about?" said he, at last.

"I know not; neither care," said the other, with a grim chuckle. "But if any man will fight me, him I fight, ever since I had beard to my chin."

"Thou art the best man that ever I faced."

"That is like enough."

"What wilt thou take, if I give thee thy life?"

"My way on which I was going. For I turn back for no man alive on land."

"Then thou hast not had enough of me?"

"Not by another hour."

"Thou must be born of fiend, and not of man."

"Very like. It is a wise son knows his own father."

Hereward burst out laughing.

"Would to heaven I had had thee for my man this three years since."

"Perhaps I would not have been thy man."

"Why not?"

"Because I have been my own man ever since I was born, and am well content with myself for my master."

"Shall I bind up thy leg?" asked Hereward, having no more to say, and not wishing to kill the man.

"No. It will grow again, like a crab's claw."

"Thou art a fiend." And Hereward turned away, sulky, and half afraid.

"Very like. No man knows what a devil he is till he tries."

"What dost mean?" and Hereward turned angrily back.

"Fiends we are all, till God's grace comes."

"Little grace has come to thee yet, by thy ungracious tongue."

"Rough to men may be gracious to women."

"What hast thou to do with women?" asked Hereward, fiercely.

"I have a wife, and I love her."

"Thou art not like to get back to her to-day."

"I fear not, with this paltry scratch. I had looked for a cut from thee, would have saved me all fighting henceforth."

"What dost mean?" asked Hereward, with an oath.

"That my wife is in heaven, and I would needs follow her."

Hereward got on his horse, and rode away. Never could he find out who that Sir Letwold was,



or how he came into the Bruneswold. All he knew was, that he never had had such a fight since he wore beard; and that he had lost sword Brainbiter: from which his evil conscience augured that his luck had turned, and that he should lose many things besides.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

HOW HEREWARD CAME IN TO THE KING

AFTER these things Hereward summoned all his men, and set before them the hopelessness of any further resistance, and the promises of amnesty, lands, and honors which William had offered him; and persuaded them — and indeed he had good arguments enough and to spare — that they should go and make their peace with the king.

They were so accustomed to look up to his determination, that when it gave way theirs gave way likewise. They were so accustomed to trust his wisdom, that most of them yielded at once to his arguments.

That the band should break up, all agreed. A few of the more suspicious, or more desperate, said that they could never trust the Frenchman; that Hereward himself had warned them again and again of his treachery; that he was now going to do himself what he had laughed at Gospatric and the rest for doing; what had brought ruin on Edwin and Morcar; what he had again and again prophesied would bring ruin on Waltheof himself ere all was over.

But Hereward was deaf to their arguments. He had said as little to them as he could about



Alftruda, for very shame; but he was utterly besotted on her. For her sake, he had determined to run his head blindly into the very snare of which he had warned others. And he had seared — so he fancied — his conscience. It was Torfrida's fault now, not his. If she left him — if she herself freed him of her own will — why, he was free, and there was no more to be said about it.

And Hereward (says the chronicler) took Gwenoch, Gery, and Matelgar, and rode south to the king.

Where were the two young Siwards? It is not said. Probably they, and a few desperadoes followed the fashion of so many English in those sad days — when, as sings the Norse scald,

> "Cold heart and bloody hand
> Now rule English land,"

and took ship for Constantinople, and enlisted in the Varanger-guard, and died full of years and honors, leaving fair-haired children behind them, to become Varangers in their turn.

Be that as it may, Hereward rode south. But when he had gotten a long way upon the road, a fancy (says the chronicler) came over him. He was not going in pomp and glory enough. It seemed mean for the once great Hereward to sneak into Winchester with three knights. Perhaps it seemed not over-safe for the once great Hereward to travel with only three knights. So he went back all the way to camp, and took (says the chronicler) "forty most famous knights, all big and tall of stature, and splendid — if from nothing else, from their looks and their harness alone."

So Hereward and those forty knights rode down

from Peterborough, along the Roman road. For the Roman roads were then, and for centuries after, the only roads in this land; and our forefathers looked on them as the work of gods and giants, and called them after the names of their old gods and heroes — Irmen Street, Watling Street, and so forth.

And then, like true Englishmen, our own forefathers showed their respect for the said divine works, not by copying them, but by picking them to pieces to pave every man his own courtyard. Be it so. The neglect of new roads, the destruction of the old ones, was a natural evil consequence of local self-government. A cheap price perhaps, after all, to pay for that power of local self-government which has kept England free unto this day.

Be that as it may, down the Roman road Hereward went; past Alconbury Hill, of the old posting days; past Hatfield, then deep forest; and so to St. Alban's, then deep forest likewise. And there they lodged in the minster; for the monks thereof were good English, and sang masses daily for King Harold's soul. And the next day they went south, by ways which are not so clear.

Just outside St. Alban's — Verulamium of the Romans (the ruins whereof were believed to be full of ghosts, demons, and magic treasures) — they turned, at St. Stephen's, to the left, off the Roman road to London; and by another Roman road struck into the vast forest which ringed London round from northeast to southwest. Following the upper waters of the Colne, which ran through the woods on their left, they came to Watford, and then turned probably to Rickmansworth. No longer on the Roman paved ways, they followed



horse-tracks, between the forest and the rich marsh-meadows of the Colne, as far as Denham, and then struck into a Roman road again at the north end of Langley Park. From thence, over heathy commons — for that western part of Buckinghamshire, its soil being light and some gravel, was little cultivated then, and hardly all cultivated now — they held on straight by Langley town into the Vale of Thames.

Little they dreamed, as they rode down by Ditton Green, off the heathy commons, past the poor scattered farms, on to the vast rushy meadows, while upon them was the dull weight of disappointment, shame, all but despair; their race enslaved, their country a prey to strangers, and all its future, like their own, a lurid blank — little they dreamed of what that vale would be within eight hundred years — the eye of England, and it may be of the world; a spot which owns more wealth and peace, more art and civilization, more beauty and more virtue, it may be, than any of the God's-gardens which make fair this earth. Windsor, on its crowned steep, was to them but a new hunting-palace of the old miracle-monger Edward, who had just ruined England. Runnymede, a mile below them down the broad stream, was but a horse-fen fringed with water-lilies, where the men of Wessex had met of old to counsel, and to bring the country to this pass. And as they crossed, by ford or ferry-boat, the shallows of old Windsor, whither they had been tending all along, and struck into the moorlands of Wessex itself, they were as men going into an unknown wilderness: behind them ruin, and before them, unknown danger.

On through Windsor Forest, Edward the Saint's

old hunting-ground; its bottoms choked with beech and oak, and birch and alder scrub; its upper lands vast flats of level heath; along the great trackway which runs along the lower side of Chobham Camp, some quarter of a mile broad, every rut and trackway as fresh at this day as when the ancient Briton, finding that his neighbor's essedum — chariot, or rather cart — had worn the ruts too deep, struck out a fresh wandering line for himself across the dreary heath.

Over the Blackwater by Sandhurst, and along the flats of Hartford Bridge, where the old furze-grown ruts show the trackway to this day. Down into the clayland forests of the Andredsweald, and up out of them again at Basing, on to the clean crisp chalk turf; to strike at Popham Lane the Roman road from Silchester, and hold it over the high downs, till they saw far below them the royal city of Winchester.

Itchen, silver as they looked on her from above, but when they came down to her, so clear that none could see where water ended and where air began, hurried through the city in many a stream. Beyond it rose the "White Camp," the "Venta Belgarum," the circular earthwork of white chalk on the high down. Within the city rose the ancient minster church, built by Ethelwold — ancient even then — where slept the ancient kings; Kennulf, Egbert, and Ethelwulf, the Saxons; and by them the Danes, Canute the Great, and Hardicanute, his son, and Norman Emma, his wife, and Ethelred's before him; and the great Earl Godwin, who seemed to Hereward to have died, not twenty, but two hundred years ago; — and it may be an old Saxon hall upon the little isle whither Edgar



had bidden bring the heads of all the wolves in Wessex, where afterwards the bishops built Wolvesey Palace. But nearer to them, on the down which sloped up to the west, stood an uglier thing, which they saw with curses deep and loud, — the keep of the new Norman castle by the west gate.

Hereward halted his knights upon the down outside the northern gate. Then he rode forward himself. The gate was open wide; but he did not care to go in.

So he rode into the gateway, and smote upon that gate with his lance-butt. But the porter saw the knights upon the down, and was afraid to come out; for he feared treason.

Then Hereward smote a second time: but the porter did not come out.

Then he took the lance by the shaft, and smote a third time. And he smote so hard, that the lance-butt flew to flinders against Winchester gate.

And at that started out two knights, who had come down from the castle, seeing the meinie on the down; and asked:

"Who art thou, who knockest here so bold?"

"Who I am, any man can see by those splinters, if he knows what men are left in England this day."

The knights looked at the broken wood, and then at each other. Who could the man be, who could beat an ash stave to flinders at a single blow?

"You are young, and do not know me; and no shame to you. Go and tell William the king, that Hereward is come to put his hands between the king's, and be the king's man henceforth."

"You are Hereward?" asked one, half awed, half disbelieving at Hereward's short stature.

"You are — I know not who. Pick up those splinters, and take them to King William; and say, 'The man who broke that lance against the gate is here to make his peace with thee,' and he will know who I am."

And so cowed were these two knights with Hereward's royal voice, and royal eye, and royal strength, that they went simply, and did what he bade them.

And when King William saw the splinters, he was as joyful as man could be, and said:

"Send him to me, and tell him, Bright shines the sun to me that lights Hereward into Winchester."

"But, lord king, he has with him a meinie of full forty knights."

"So much the better. I shall have the more valiant Englishmen to help my valiant French."

So Hereward rode round, outside the walls, to William's new entrenched palace outside the west gate, by the castle.

And then Hereward went in, and knelt before the Norman, and put his hands between William's hands, and swore to be his man.

"I have kept my word," said he, "which I sent to thee at Rouen seven years agone. Thou art king of all England; and I am the last man to say so."

"And since thou hast said it, I am king indeed. Come with me, and dine; and to-morrow I will see thy knights."

And William walked out of the hall leaning on Hereward's shoulder, at which all the Normans gnashed their teeth with envy.

"And for my knights, lord king? Thine and mine will mix, for a while yet, like oil and water;



and I fear lest there be murder done between them."

"Likely enough."

So the knights were bestowed in a "vill" near by; "and the next day the venerable king himself went forth to see those knights, and caused them to stand, and march before him, both with arms and without. With whom being much delighted, he praised them, congratulating them on their beauty and stature, and saying that they must all be knights of fame in war." After which Hereward sent them all home except two; and waited till he should marry Alftruda, and get back his heritage.

"And when that happens," said William, "why should we not have two weddings, beausire, as well as one? I hear that you have in Crowland a fair daughter, and marriageable."

Hereward bowed.

"And I have found a husband for her suitable to her years, and who may conduce to your peace and serenity."

Hereward bit his lip. To refuse was impossible in those days. But——

"I trust that your grace has found a knight of higher lineage than him, whom, after so many honors, you honored with the hand of my niece."

William laughed. It was not his interest to quarrel with Hereward. "Aha! Ivo, the wood-cutter's son. I ask your pardon for that, Sir Hereward. Had you been my man then, as you are now, it might have been different."

"If a king ask my pardon, I can only ask his in return."

"You must be friends with Taillebois. He is a brave knight, and a wise warrior."

"None ever doubted that."

"And to cover any little blots in his scutcheon, I have made him an earl, as I may make you some day."

"Your majesty, like a true king, knows how to reward. Who is this knight whom you have chosen for my lass?"

"Sir Hugh of Evermue, a neighbor of yours, and a man of blood and breeding."

"I know him, and his lineage; and it is very well. I humbly thank your majesty."

"Can I be the same man?" said Hereward to himself, bitterly.

And he was not the same man. He was besotted on Alftruda, and humbled himself accordingly.

CHAPTER XXXIX

HOW TORFRIDA CONFESSED THAT SHE HAD BEEN INSPIRED BY THE DEVIL

AFTER a few days there came down a priest to Crowland from Winchester, and talked with Torfrida.

And she answered him, the priest said, so wisely and well, that he never had met a woman of so clear a brain, or of so stout a heart.

At last, being puzzled to get that which he wanted, he touched on the matter of her marriage with Hereward.

She wished it, he said, dissolved. She wished herself to enter religion.

The Church would be most happy to sanction so holy a desire, but there were objections. She was a married woman; and her husband had not given his consent.

"Let him give it, then."

There were still objections. He had nothing to bring against her which could justify the dissolution of the holy bond: unless——

"Unless I bring some myself?"

"There have been rumors — I say not how true — of magic and sorcery——"

Torfrida leapt up from her seat, and laughed such a laugh, that the priest said, in after years, it

rung through his head as if it had arisen out of the pit of the lost.

"So that is what you want, churchman? Then you shall have it. Bring me pen and ink. I need not confess to you. You shall read my confession when it is done. I am a better scribe, mind you, than any clerk between here and Paris."

She seized the pen and ink, and wrote; not fiercely, as the priest expected, but slowly and carefully. Then she gave it the priest to read.

"Will that do, churchman? Will that free my soul, and that of your French archbishop?"

And the priest read to himself:

How Torfrida of St. Omer, born at Arles in Provence, confessed that from her youth up she had been given to the practice of diabolic arts, and had at divers times and places used the same, both alone and with Richilda, late Countess of Hainault. How, wickedly, wantonly, and instinct with a malignant spirit, she had compassed, by charms and spells, to win the love of Hereward. How she had ever since kept in bondage him, and others whom she had not loved with the same carnal love, but only desired to make them useful to her own desire of power and glory, by the same magical arts; for which she now humbly begged pardon of Holy Church, and of all Christian folk; and, penetrated with compunction, desired only that she might retire into the convent of Crowland. She asserted the marriage which she had so unlawfully compassed to be null and void; and prayed to be released therefrom, as a burden to her conscience and soul, that she might spend the rest of her life in penitence for her many enormous sins. She submitted herself to the judgment of Holy Church,



only begging that this her free confession might be counted in her favor, and that she might not be put to death, as she deserved, nor immured perpetually; because her mother-in-law according to the flesh, the Countess Godiva, being old and infirm, had daily need of her; and she wished to serve her menially as long as she lived. After which, she put herself utterly upon the judgment of the Church. And meanwhile she desired and prayed that she might be allowed to remain in perpetual imprisonment (whereby her marriage could be canonically dissolved) in the said monastery of Crowland, not leaving the precincts thereof without special leave given by the abbot and prioress in one case between her and them reserved; to wear garments of haircloth; to fast all the year on bread and water; and to be disciplined with rods or otherwise, at such times as the prioress should command, and to such degree as her body, softened with carnal luxury, could reasonably endure. And beyond — that, being dead to the world, God might have mercy on her soul.

And she meant what she said. The madness of remorse and disappointment, so common in the wild middle age, had come over her; and with it the twin madness of self-torture.

The priest read, and trembled; not for Torfrida, but for himself, lest she should enchant him after all.

"She must have been an awful sinner," said he to the monks when he got safe out of the room; "comparable only to the witch of Endor, or the woman Jezebel, of whom St. John writes in the Revelations."

"I do not know how you Frenchmen measure

folks, when you see them: but to our mind she is — for goodness, humility, and patience, comparable only to an angel of God," said Abbot Ulfketyl.

"You Englishmen will have to change your minds on many points, if you mean to stay here."

"We shall not change them, and we shall stay here," quoth the abbot.

"How? You will not get Sweyn and his Danes to help you a second time."

"No, we shall all die, and give you your wills, and you will not have the heart to cast our bones into the fens?"

"Not unless you intend to work miracles, and set up for saints, like your Alphege and Edmund."

"Heaven forbid that we should compare ourselves with them! Only let us alone till we die."

"If you let us alone, and do not turn traitor meanwhile."

Abbot Ulfketyl bit his lip, and kept down the rising fiend.

"And now," said the priest, "deliver me over Torfrida the younger, daughter of Hereward and this woman, that I may take her to the king, who has found a fit husband for her."

"You will hardly get her."

"Not get her?"

"Not without her mother's consent. The lass cares for naught but her."

"Pish! that sorceress? Send for the girl."

Abbot Ulfketyl, forced in his own abbey, great and august lord though he was, to obey any upstart of a Norman priest who came backed by the king and Lanfranc, sent for the lass.

The young outlaw came in — hawk on fist, and



its hood off, for it was a pet — short, sturdy, upright, brown-haired, blue-eyed, ill-dressed, with hard hands and sunburnt face, but with the hawk-eye of her father and her mother, and the hawks among which she was bred. She looked the priest over from head to foot, till he was abashed.

"A Frenchman!" said she, and she said no more.

The priest looked at her eyes, and then at the hawk's eyes. They were disagreeably like each other. He told his errand as courteously as he could, for he was not a bad-hearted man for a Norman priest.

The lass laughed him to scorn. The king's commands? She never saw a king in the greenwood, and cared for none. There was no king in England now, since Sweyn Ulfsson sailed back to Denmark. Who was this French William, to sell a free English lass like a colt or a cow? The priest might go back to the slaves of Wessex, and command them if he could: but in the fens men were free, and lasses too.

The priest was piously shocked and indignant, and began to argue.

She played with her hawk instead of listening. and then was marching out of the room.

"Your mother," said he, "is a sorceress."

"You are a knave, or set on by knaves. You lie; and you know you lie." And she turned away again.

"She has confessed it."

"You have driven her mad between you, till she will confess anything. I presume you threatened to burn her, as some of you did a while back."

And the young lady made use of words equally strong and true.

The priest was not accustomed to the direct language of the greenwood, and indignant on his own account, threatened, and finally offered to use, force. Whereon there looked up into his face such a demon (so he said) as he never had seen or dreamed of, and said:

"If you lay a finger on me, I will brittle you like any deer." And therewith pulled out a saying-knife, about half as long again as the said priest's hand, being very sharp, so he deposed, down the whole length of one edge, and likewise down his little finger's length of the other.

Not being versed in the terms of English venery, he asked Abbot Ulfketyl what brittling of a deer might mean; and being informed that it was that operation on the carcase of a stag which his countrymen called eventrer, he subsided, and thought it best to go and consult the young lady's mother.

She, to his astonishment, submitted at once and utterly. The king, and he whom she had called her husband, were very gracious. It was all well. She would have preferred, and the Lady Godiva too, after their experience of the world and the flesh, to have devoted her daughter to heaven in the minster there. But she was unworthy. Who was she, to train a bride for Him who died on the cross? She accepted this as part of her penance, with thankfulness and humility. She had heard that Sir Hugh of Evermue was a gentleman of ancient birth and good prowess, and she thanked the king for his choice. Let the priest tell her daughter that she commanded her to go with him to Winchester. She did not wish to see her. She



was stained with many crimes, and unworthy to approach a pure maiden. Besides, it would only cause misery and tears. She was trying to die to the world and to the flesh; and she did not wish to reawaken their power within her. Yes. It was very well. Let the lass go with him.

"Thou art indeed a true penitent," said the priest, his human heart softening him.

"Thou art very much mistaken," said she, and turned away.

The girl, when she heard her mother's command, wept, shrieked, and went. At least she was going to her father. And from wholesome fear of that same saying-knife, the priest left her in peace all the way to Winchester.

After which, Abbot Ulfketyl went into his lodgings, and burst, like a noble old nobleman as he was, into bitter tears of rage and shame.

But Torfrida's eyes were as dry as her own sackcloth.

The priest took the letter back, and showed it — it may be to Archbishop Lanfranc, who was well versed in such matters, having already (as is well known to all the world) arranged King William's uncanonical marriage, by help of Archdeacon Hildebrand, afterwards Pope. But what he said, this chronicler would not dare to say. For he was a very wise man, and a very stanch and strong pillar of the Holy Roman Church. And doubtless he was man enough not to require that anything should be added to Torfrida's penance; and that would have been enough to prove him a man in those days — at least for a churchman — as it proved Archbishop or Saint Ailred to be, a few years after, in the case of the nun of Watton, to

be read in Gale's "Scriptores Anglicaniæ." Then he showed the letter to Alftruda.

And she laughed one of her laughs, and said, "I have her at last!"

Then, as it befell, he was forced to show the letter to Queen Matilda; and she wept over it human tears, such as she, the noble heart, had been forced to weep many a time before, and said, "The poor soul! — You, Alftruda, woman! does Hereward know of this?"

"No, madam," said Alftruda, not adding that she had taken good care that he should not know.

"It is the best thing which I have heard of him. I should tell him, were it not that I must not meddle with my lord's plans. God grant him a good delivery, as they say of the poor souls in gaol. Well, madam, you have your will at last. God give you grace thereof, for you have not given him much chance as yet."

"Your majesty will honor us by coming to the wedding?" asked Alftruda, utterly unabashed.

Matilda the Good looked at her with a face of such calm childlike astonishment, that Alftruda dropped her proud head at last, and slunk out of the presence like a beaten cur.

But William went to the wedding; and swore horrible oaths that they were the handsomest pair he had ever seen. And so Hereward married Alftruda. How Holy Church settled the matter, is not said. But that Hereward married Alftruda, under these very circumstances, may be considered a "historic fact," being vouched for both by Gaimar, and by Richard of Ely. And doubtless, Holy Church contrived that it should happen without sin, if it conduced to her own interest.



And little Torfrida — then aged, it seems, some sixteen years — was married to Hugh of Evermue. She wept and struggled as she was dragged into the church.

"But I do not want to be married. I want to go back to my mother."

"The diabolic instinct may have descended to her," said the priests, "and attracts her to the sorceress. We had best sprinkle her with holy water."

So they sprinkled her with holy water, and used exorcisms. Indeed, the case being an important one, and the personages of rank, they brought out from their treasures the apron of a certain virgin saint, and put it round her neck, in hopes of driving out the hereditary fiend.

"If I am led with a halter, I must needs go," said she, with one of her mother's own flashes of wit, and went. "But, Lady Alftruda," whispered she, half-way up the church, "I never loved him."

"Behave yourself before the king, or I will whip you till the blood runs."

And so she would; and no one would have wondered in those days.

"I will murder you, if you do. But I never even saw him."

"Little fool! And what are you going through, but what I went through before you?"

"You to say that?" gnashed the girl, as another spark of her mother's wit came out. "And you gaining what ——"

"What I waited for for fifteen years," said Alftruda, coolly. "If you have courage and cunning like me, to wait for fifteen years, you too may have your will likewise."

The pure child shuddered; and was married to Hugh of Evermue, who was, according to them of Crowland, a good friend to that monastery, and therefore, doubtless, a good man. Once, says wicked report, he offered to strike her, as was the fashion in those chivalrous days. Whereon she turned upon him like a tigress, and bidding him remember that she was the daughter of Hereward and Torfrida, gave him such a beating that he, not wishing to draw sword upon her, surrendered at discretion; and they lived all their lives afterwards as happily as most other married people in those times.

All this, however pleasant to Hereward, was not pleasant to the French courtiers; whereon, after the simple fashion of those times, they looked about for one who would pick a quarrel with Hereward and slay him in fair fight. But an Archibald Bell-the-Cat was not to be found behind every hedge.

Still, he might be provoked to fight. If his foe was slain, so much the worse for both parties. For a duel, especially if a fatal one, within the precincts of the king's court, was a grave offence, punishable, at least in extreme cases, with death.

Now it befell, that among them at Winchester was Oger the Breton, he who had held Morcar's lands round Bourne, and who was now in wrath and dread enough at the prospect of having to give them up to Hereward. It was no difficult matter to set the hot-headed Celt on to provoke the equally hot-headed Wake; and accordingly, Oger, having been duly plied with wine, was advised to say one afternoon —

"Hereward feeds well at the king's table.



French cooking is a pleasant change for an outlaw, who has fed for many a day on rats and mice and such small deer."

"A pleasanter change for a starveling Breton, who was often glad enough, ere he came to England, to rob his own ponies of their furze-toppings, and boil them down for want of kale."

"We use furze-toppings in Brittany to scourge saucy churls withal. Speakest thou thus to me, who have the blood of King Arthur and half his knights in my veins?"

"Then discipline thine own churl's back therewith; for churl thou art, though thou comest of Arthur's blood. Nay, I will not quarrel with thee. I have had too many gnats pestering me in the fens already to care for one more here."

Wherefrom the Breton judged that Hereward had no lust to fight.

The next day he met Hereward going out to hunt, and was confirmed in his opinion when Hereward lifted his cap to him most courteously, saying that he was not aware before that his neighbor was a gentleman of such high lineage.

"Lineage? Better at least than thine, thou bare-legged Saxon, who hast dared to call me base-born and starveling? So thou must needs have thy throat cut? I took thee for a wiser man."

"Many have taken me for that which I am not. If you will harness yourself, I will do the same; and we will ride up to the woods, and settle this matter in peace."

"Three men on each side to see fair play," said the Breton.

And up to the woods they rode; and fought long without advantage on either side.

Hereward was not the man which he had been. His nerve was gone, as well as his conscience; and all the dash and fury of his old onslaughts gone therewith.

He grew tired of the fight, not in body, but in mind; and more than once drew back.

"Let us stop this child's play," said he, according to the chronicler; "what need have we to fight here all day about nothing?"

Whereat the Breton fancied him already more than half-beaten, and attacked more furiously than ever. He would be the first man on earth who ever had had the better of the great outlaw. He would win himself eternal glory, as the champion of all England.

But he had mistaken his man, and his indomitable English pluck. "It was Hereward's fashion in fight and war," says the chronicler, "always to ply the man most at the last." And so found the Breton; for Hereward suddenly lost patience, and rushing on him with one of his old shouts, hewed at him again and again, as if his arm would never tire.

Oger gave back, would he or not. In a few moments his sword-arm dropped to his side, cut half through.

"Have you had enough, Sir Tristram the younger?" quoth Hereward, wiping his sword, and walking moodily away.

The fruit of which was this. That within twenty-four hours Hereward was arrested on a charge of speaking evil of the king, breaking his peace, compassing the death of his faithful lieges, and various other wicked, traitorous, and diabolical acts.

He was to be sent to Bedford castle, in the custody of Robert Herepol, chatelain of Bedford, a



reasonable and courteous man. The king had spared his life, in consideration of his having first submitted himself.

Hereward went like a man stunned, and spoke never a word. Day after day he rode northward, unarmed for the first time for many a year; and for the first time in all his years, with gyves on ankle and on wrist. This was the wages of his sin. This was the faith of Frenchmen. He was not astonished, hardly disappointed. Hatred of William, and worse, hatred of himself, swept all the passions from his soul. Of Alftruda he never thought for a moment. Indeed, he never thought steadily of anything, was hardly conscious of anything, till he heard the key turned on him in a room — not a small or doleful one — in Bedford keep; and found an iron shackle on his leg, fastened to the stone bench on which he sat.

Robert of Herepol had meant to leave his prisoner loose. But there were those among his French guards who told him, and with truth, that if he did so, no man's life would be safe; that to brain the gaoler with his own keys, and then twist out of his bowels a line wherewith to let himself down from the top of the castle, would be not only easy, but amusing, to the famous "Wake."

So Robert consented to fetter him so far, but no farther; and begged his pardon again and again as did it, pleading the painful necessities of his office.

But Hereward heard him not. He sat in stupefied despair. A great black cloud had covered all heaven and earth, and entered into his brain through every sense; till his mind, as he said afterwards, was like hell with the fire gone out.

A gaoler came in, he knew not how long after, bringing a good meal, and wine. He came cautiously toward the prisoner, and when still beyond the length of his chain, set the food down, and thrust it toward him with a stick, lest Hereward should leap on him and wring his neck.

But Hereward never even saw him or the food. He sat there all day, all night, and nearly all the next day, and hardly moved hand or foot. The gaoler told Sir Robert in the evening that he thought the man was mad, and would die.

So good Sir Robert went up to him, and spoke kindly and hopefully. But all Hereward answered was, that he was very well. That he wanted nothing. That he had always heard well of Sir Robert. That he should like to get a little sleep: but that sleep would not come.

The next day Sir Robert came again early, and found him sitting in the same place.

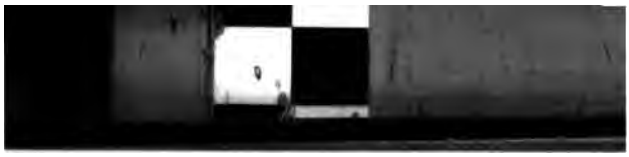
"He was very well," he said. "How could he be otherwise? He was just where he ought to be. A man could not be better than in his right place."

Whereon Sir Robert gave him up for mad.

Then he bethought of sending him a harp, knowing the fame of Hereward's music and singing. "And when he saw the harp," the gaoler said, "he wept; but bade take the thing away. And so sat still where he was."

In this state of dull despair, he remained for many weeks. At last he woke up.

There passed through and by Bedford large bodies of troops, going as it were to and from battle. The clank of arms stirred Hereward's



heart as of old, and he sent to Sir Robert to ask what was toward.

Sir Robert, "the venerable man," came to him joyfully and at once, glad to speak to an illustrious captive, whom he looked on as an injured person; and told him news enough.

Taillebois' warning about Ralph Guader and Waltheof had not been needless. Ralph, as the most influential of the Bretons, was on no good terms with the Normans, save with one, and that one of the most powerful — Fitz Osbern, Earl of Hereford. His sister, Ralph was to have married: but William, for reasons unknown, forbade the match. The two great earls celebrated the wedding in spite of William, and asked Waltheof as a guest. And at Exning, between the fen and Newmarket Heath —

> "Was that bride-ale
> Which was man's bale."

For there was matured the plot which Ivo and others had long seen brewing. William (they said) had made himself hateful to all men by his cruelties and tyrannies; and, indeed, his government was growing more unrighteous day by day. Let them drive him out of England, and part the land between them. Two should be dukes, the third king paramount.

"Waltheof, I presume," quoth Hereward, "plotted drunk, and repented sober, when too late. The wittol! He should have been a monk."

"Repented he has, if ever he was guilty. For he fled to Archbishop Lanfranc, and confessed to him so much, that Lanfranc declares him innocent, and has sent him on to William in Normandy."

"Oh, kind priest! true priest! To send his sheep into the wolf's mouth."

"You forget, dear sire, that William is our king."

"I can hardly forget that, with this pretty ring upon my ankle. But after my experience of how he has kept faith with me, what can I expect for Waltheof the wittol, save that which I have foretold many a time?"

"As for you, dear sire, the king has been misinformed concerning you. I have sent messengers to reason with him again and again: but as long as Taillebois, Warrenne, and Robert Malet had his ear, of what use were my poor words?"

"And what said they?"

"That there would be no peace in England if you were loose."

"They lied. I am no boy, like Waltheof. I know when the game is played out. And it is played out now. The Frenchman is master, and I know it well. Were I loose to-morrow, and as great a fool as Waltheof, what could I do, with, it may be, some forty knights, and a hundred men-at-arms, against all William's armies? But how goes on this fools' rebellion? If I had been loose, I might have helped to crush it in the bud."

"And you would have done that against Waltheof?"

"Why not against him? He is but bringing more misery on England. Tell that to William. Tell him that if he sets me free, I will be the first to attack Waltheof, or whom he will. There are no English left to fight against," said he, bitterly, "for Waltheof is none now."

"He shall know your words when he returns to England."



"What, is he abroad, and all this evil going on?"

"In Normandy. But the English have risen for the king in Herefordshire, and beaten Earl Roger; and Odo of Bayeux and Bishop Mowbray are on their way to Cambridge, where they hope to give a good account of Earl Ralph; and hope, too, that the English may help them there."

"And they shall! They hate Ralph Guader as much as I do. Can you send a message for me?"

"Whither?"

"To Bourne in the Bruneswold; and say to Hereward's men, wherever they are, Let them rise and arm, if they love Hereward; and go down to Cambridge, to be the foremost at Bishop Odo's side against Ralph Guader, or Waltheof himself. Send! send! Oh that I were free!"

"Would to heaven thou wert free, my gallant sir!" said the good man.

From that day Hereward woke up somewhat. He was still a broken man, querulous, peevish: but the hope of freedom and the hope of battle stirred him. If he could but get to his men! But his melancholy returned. His men — some of them at least — went down to Odo at Cambridge, and did good service. Guader was utterly routed, and escaped to Norwich, and thence to Brittany, his home. The bishops punished their prisoners, the rebel French, with horrible mutilations.

"The wolves are beginning to eat each other," said Hereward to himself. But it was a sickening thought to him, that his men had been fighting and he not at their head.

After a while there came to Bedford castle two witty knaves. One was a cook, who "came to buy

milk," says the chronicler; the other seemingly a gleeman. They told stories, jested, harped, sang, drank, and pleased much the garrison and Sir Robert, who let them hang about the place.

They asked next, whether it were true that the famous Wake was there? If so, might a man have a look at him?

The gaoler said that many men might have gone to see him, so easy was Sir Robert to him. But he would have no man; and none dare enter save Sir Robert and he, for fear of their lives. But he would ask him of Herepol.

The good knight of Herepol said, "Let the rogues go in, they may amuse the poor soul."

So they went in; and as soon as they went, he knew them. One was Martin Lightfoot; the other, Leofric his mass-priest.

"Who sent you?" asked he surlily, turning his face away.

"She."

"Who?"

"We know but one she, and she is at Crowland."

"She sent you? and wherefore?"

"That we might sing to you, and make you merry."

Hereward answered them with a terrible word, and turned his face to the wall, groaning, and then bade them sternly to go.

So they went, for the time.

The gaoler told this to Sir Robert, who understood all, being a kind-hearted man.

"From his poor first wife, eh? Well, there can be no harm in that. Nor if they came from this Lady Alftruda either, for that matter; let them go in and out when they will."



"But they may be spies and traitors."

"Then we can but hang them."

Robert of Herepol, it would appear from the chronicle, did not much care whether they were spies or not.

So the men went to and fro; and often sat with Hereward. But he forbade them sternly to mention Torfrida's name.

Alftruda, meanwhile, returned to Bourne, and took possession of her new husband's house and lands. She sent him again and again messages of passionate love and sorrow; but he listened to them as sullenly as he did to his two servants, and sent no answer back. And so he sat more weary months, in the very prison, it may be in the very room, in which John Bunyan sat nigh six hundred years after: but in a very different frame of mind.

One day Sir Robert was going up the stairs with another knight, and met the two coming down. He was talking to that knight earnestly, indignantly: and somehow, as he passed Leofric and Martin, he thought fit to raise his voice, as if in a great wrath.

"Shame to all honor and chivalry! Good saints in heaven, what a thing is human fortune! That this man, who had once a gallant army at his back, should be at this moment going like a sheep to the slaughter, to Buckingham castle, at the mercy of his worst enemy — of Ivo Taillebois, of all men in the world! If there were a dozen knights left of all those whom he used to heap with wealth and honor, worthy the name of knights, they would catch us between here and Stratford, and make a free man of their lord."

So spake — or words to that effect, according to



the Latin chronicler, who must have got them from Leofric himself — the good knight of Herepol.

"Hillo, knaves!" said he, seeing the two, "are you here eavesdropping? Out of the castle this instant, on your lives."

Which hint those two witty knaves took on the spot.

A few days after, Hereward was travelling toward Buckingham, chained upon a horse, with Sir Robert and his men, and a goodly company of knights belonging to Ivo. Ivo, as the story runs, seems to have arranged with Ralph Pagnel at Buckingham, to put him into the keeping of a creature of his own. And how easy it was to put out a man's eyes, or starve him to death, in a French keep, none knew better than Hereward.

But he was past fear or sorrow. A dull heavy cloud of despair had settled down upon his soul. Black with sin, his heart could not pray. He had hardened himself against all heaven and earth; and thought, when he thought at all, only of his wrongs: but never of his sins.

CHAPTER XL

HOW EARL WALTHEOF WAS MADE A SAINT

A DAY or two after, there sat in Abbot Thorold's lodgings in Peterborough, a select company of Frenchmen, talking over affairs of state after their supper.

"Well, lords and knights," said the abbot, as he sipped his wine, "the cause of our good king, which is happily the cause of Holy Church, goes well, I think. We have much to be thankful for when we review the events of the past year. We have finished the rebels; Roger de Breteuil is safe in prison, Ralph Guader unsafe in Brittany, and Waltheof more than unsafe in — the place to which traitors descend. We have not a manor left which is not in loyal hands; we have not an English monk left who has not been scourged and starved into holy obedience; not an English saint for whom any man cares a jot, since Guerin de Lire preached down St. Adhelm, the admirable primate disposed of St. Alphege's martyrdom, and some other wise man — I am ashamed to say that I forget who — proved that St. Edmund of Suffolk was merely a barbarian kinglet, who was killed fighting with Danes only a little more heathen than himself. We have had great labors and great sufferings since we landed in this barbarous isle upon our holy errand ten years since: but, under the shadow

of the Gonfalon of St. Peter, we have conquered, and may sing 'Dominus Illuminatio mea,' with humble and thankful hearts."

"I don't know that," said Ascelin, "my lord uncle; I shall never sing 'Dominus Illuminatio,' till I see your coffers illuminated once more by those thirty thousand marks."

"Or I," said Ivo Taillebois, "till I see Hereward's head on Bourne gable, where he stuck up those Frenchmen's heads seven years ago, as his will be, within a week after he gets to Buckingham castle — where he should be by now. But what the lord abbot means by saying that we have done with English saints I do not see; for the rogues of Crowland have just made a new one for themselves."

"A new one?"

"I tell you truth and fact; I will tell you all, lord abbot; and you shall judge whether it is not enough to drive an honest man mad to see such things going on under his nose. Men say of me that I am rough, and swear, and blaspheme. I put it to you, lord abbot, if Job would not have cursed if he had been lord of Spalding. You know that the king let these Crowland monks have Waltheof's body?"

"Yes, I thought it an unwise act of grace. It would have been wiser to leave him, as he intended, out on the bare down, in ground unconsecrate: but what has happened?"

"That old traitor, Ulfketyl, and his monks, bring the body to Crowland, and bury it as if it had been the Pope's. In a week they begin to spread their lies — that Waltheof was innocent; that Archbishop Lanfranc himself said so."



"That was the only act of human weakness which I have ever known the venerable prelate commit," said Thorold.

"That the burghers at Winchester were so deep in the traitor's favor, that the king had to have him out and cut off his head in the gray of the morning, ere folks were up and about; that the fellow was so holy that he passed all his time in prison in weeping and praying, and said over the whole psalter every day, because his mother had taught it him — I wish she had taught him to be an honest man — and that when his head was on the block he said all the Paternoster, as far as 'Lead us not into temptation,' and then off went his head; whereon, his head being off, he finished the prayer with — you know best what comes next, abbot?"

"'Deliver us from evil, Amen!' What a manifest lie! The traitor was not permitted, it is plain, to ask for that which could never be granted to him: but his soul, unworthy to be delivered from evil, entered instead into evil, and howls forever in the pit."

"But all the rest may be true," said one; "and yet that be no reason why these monks should say it."

"So I told them," quoth Taillebois, "and threatened them too; for, not content with making him a martyr, they are making him a saint."

"Impious! Who can do that, save the Holy Father?" said Thorold.

"You had best get your bishop to look to them, then; for they are carrying blind beggars and mad girls by the dozen to be cured at the man's tomb, that is all. Their fellows in the cell at

Spalding went about to take a girl that had fits off one of my manors, to cure her; but that I stopped with a good horsewhip."

"And rightly."

"And gave the monks a piece of my mind; and drove them clean out of their cell home to Crowland."

What a piece of Ivo's mind on this occasion might be, let Ingulf describe —

"Against our monastery and all the people of Crowland he was, by the instigation of the devil, raised to such an extreme pitch of fury, that he would follow their animals in the marshes with his dogs, drive them to a great distance down in the lakes, mutilate some in the tails, others in the ears, while often, by breaking the backs and legs of the beasts of burden, he rendered them utterly useless. Against our cell also (at Spalding) and our brethren, his neighbors, the prior and monks, who dwelt all day within his presence, he raged with tyrannical and frantic fury, lamed their oxen and horses, daily impounded their sheep and poultry; striking down, killing, and slaying their swine and pigs; while at the same time the servants of the prior were oppressed in the earl's court with insupportable exactions, were often assaulted in the highways with swords and staves, and sometimes killed."

At this moment there was a bustle outside. The door which led from the hall was thrown open, and then rushed in, muddy and gory, Oger the Breton.

"Have a care for yourselves, lordlings! The Wake is loose!"

If the earth had opened between them, the



party could not have started more suddenly on their feet.

When their curses had lulled somewhat, Oger told his story between great gulps of wine; for he was nigh dead with hard riding.

"We were in a forest, midway between Bedford and Buckingham, when the rascals dashed out on us — Gwenoch and Winter, and the rest, with that Ramsey monk and the Wake banner — I know not how many there were. We had no time to form, or even arm. Our helmets were hanging at our saddle-bows — it was all over in a minute."

"Cleverly done!" shouted Ivo, in spite of his curses; for he honestly loved deeds of arms, for him or against him. "One Wake makes many."

"And that old traitor of Herepol refused to fight. We were past his jurisdiction, he said. Your men, Lord Ivo, and Sir Ralph's must guard the prisoner, if they would."

"He has been in league with the Wake all through."

"That has he. For when the Wake was freed and armed, and hewing away like a devilish dwarf as he is, he always bade spare Sir Robert, crying that he was his friend and his savior; and ere they parted the two villains shook hands lovingly, saying aloud, how Sir Robert should ride post to the king, and give him a good report of Hereward."

The comments which followed this statement had best be omitted, as they consisted wholly of French oaths.

"And how camest thou alive hither, of all men?" asked the abbot, at last.

"How? I was smitten down at once, having no

sword-arm, as you know. But the Wake, when he saw me down, bade spare me. He would not slay me, lest the king should say he did it for the sake of my lands. I should ride to you here at Peterborough, and carry this message to you all; that whoso wanted his head cut off, should come to him at Bourne."

"He has promised to cut my head off long ago," said Ascelin. "Earl, knights, and gentlemen, do you not think it wiser that we should lay our wits together once and for all, and cut off his?"

"But who will catch the Wake sleeping?" said Ivo, laughing.

"That will I. I have my plans, and my intelligencers."

"You your intelligencers?"

"Nobles, there is naught suits so much my chivalrous humor, as the consoling of distressed ladies. I may have visited the fair Alftruda at Bourne; I may have reminded her of certain old pleasant passages between her and me."

"Which may end in thy going over thy horse's croup, nephew; as thou didst about another dame of Hereward's."

"Uncle? What would a singer of doughty deeds, and a doer thereof beside, like you, have me do — especially when we both have thirty thousand marks to avenge — save dare again — perhaps to win? No, no. I lost that Torfrida: but I am grown cunninger now; and Alftruda is an easier game to fly at. I may have said to her, for instance, that she had better have chosen me; and been answered by gentle wailings about who should protect her in her loneliness: I may have offered to do so myself, and been shrieked at with



'Out, traitor! Wretch!' and yet have visited Bourne again — in all honesty, mind you, my lords. And I may have talked with a pretty bower-maiden, and have said that though Abbot Thorold be poor, yet he has a ring or two left, or an owch, or such like, which might be earned by service due. And so forth. Wait for me, my good lords all; and I will not keep you waiting long."

And so those wicked men took counsel together to slay Hereward.



CHAPTER XLI

HOW HEREWARD BEGAN TO GET HIS SOUL'S PRICE

AND now behold Hereward at home again, fat with the wages of sin, and not knowing that they are death.

He is once more "Dominus de Brunne cum Marisco," Lord of Bourne with the fen, "with all returns and liberties and all other things adjacent to the same vill which are now held as a barony from the lord king of England." He has a fair young wife, and with her farms and manors even richer than his own. He is still young, hearty, wise by experience, high in the king's favor, and deservedly so.

Why should he not begin life again?

Why not? Unless it be true that the wages of sin are, not a new life, but death.

And yet he had his troubles. Hardly a French knight or baron round but had a blood-feud against him, for a kinsman slain. Oger the Breton was not likely to forgive his wounded arm. Sir Aswart, Thorold the abbot's man, was not likely to forgive him for turning him out of the three Manthorpe manors, which he had comfortably held for two years past, and sending him back to lounge in the abbot's hall at Peterborough, without a yard of



land which he could call his own. Sir Ascelin was not likely to forgive him for marrying Alftruda, whom he had intended to marry himself. Ivo Taillebois was not likely to forgive him for existing within a hundred miles of Spalding, any more than the wolf would forgive the lamb for fouling the water below him. Beside, had not he (Ivo) married Hereward's niece? And what more grievous offence could Hereward commit, than to be her uncle, reminding Ivo of his own low birth by his nobility, and too likely to take Lucia's part, whenever it should please Ivo to beat or kick her? Only Gilbert of Ghent, "the pious and illustrious earl," sent messages of congratulation and friendship to Hereward, it being his custom to sail with the wind, and worship the rising sun — till it should decline again.

But more: hardly one of the Frenchmen round, but, in the conceit of their skin-deep yesterday's civilization, looked on Hereward as a barbarian Englishman, who had his throat tattooed, and wore a short coat, and preferred — the churl — to talk English in his own hall, though he could talk as good French as they when he was with them, beside three or four barbarian tongues if he had need.

But more still: if they were not likely to bestow their love on Hereward, Hereward was not likely to win love from them of his own will. He was peevish and wrathful, often insolent and quarrelsome: and small blame to him. The French were invaders and tyrants, who had no business there, and would not have been there, if he had had his way. And they and he could no more amalgamate than fire and water. Moreover, he was a very great man, or had been such once, and he thought

himself one still. He had been accustomed to command men, whole armies; and he would no more treat these French as his equals than they would treat him as such. His own son-in-law, Hugh of Evermue, had to take hard words, — thoroughly well-deserved, it may be; but all the more unpleasant for that reason.

The truth was, that Hereward's heart was gnawed with shame and remorse; and therefore he fancied, and not without reason, that all men pointed at him the finger of scorn.

He had done a bad, base, accursed deed. And he knew it. Once in his life — for his other sins were but the sins of his age — the Father of men seems (if the chroniclers say truth) to have put before this splendid barbarian good and evil, saying, Choose! And he knew that the evil was evil, and chose it nevertheless.

Eight hundred years after, a far greater genius and greater general had the same choice — as far as human cases of conscience can be alike — put before him. And he chose as Hereward chose.

But as with Napoleon and Josephine, so it was with Hereward and Torfrida. Neither throve after.

It was not punished by miracle. What sin is? It worked out its own punishment; that which it merited, deserved, or earned, by its own labor. No man could commit such a sin without shaking his whole character to the root. Hereward tried to persuade himself that his was not shaken; that he was the same Hereward as ever. But he could not deceive himself long. His conscience was evil. He was discontented with all mankind, and with himself most of all. He tried to be good, — as good as he chose to be. If he had done wrong



in one thing, he might make up for it in others: but he could not. All his higher instincts fell from him one by one. He did not like to think of good and noble things; he dared not think of them. He felt, not at first, but as the months rolled on, that he was a changed man; that God had left him. His old bad habits began to return to him. Gradually he sank back more and more into the very vices from which Torfrida had raised him sixteen years before. He took to drinking again, to dull the malady of thought; he excused himself to himself; he wished to forget his defeats, his disappointment, the ruin of his country, the splendid past which lay behind him like a dream. True: but he wished to forget likewise Torfrida fasting and weeping in Crowland. He could not bear the sight of Crowland tower on the far green horizon, the sound of Crowland bells booming over the flat on the south wind. He never rode down into the fens; he never went to see his daughter at Deeping, because Crowland lay that way. He went up into the old Bruneswold; hunted all day long through the glades where he and his merry men had done their doughty deeds; and came home in the evening to get drunk.

Then he lost his sleep. He sent down to Crowland to Leofric the priest, that he might come to him, and sing him sagas of the old heroes, that he might get rest. But Leofric sent back for answer, that he would not come.

That night Alftruda heard him by her side in the still hours, weeping silently to himself. She caressed him: but he gave no heed to her.

"I believe," said she bitterly, at last, "that you love Torfrida still better than you do me."

And Hereward answered, like Modwenna in the case, "That do I, by heaven. She believed in me when no one else in the world did."

And the vain jaunt Alfreda answered angrily; and there was many a fierce quarrel between them after that.

With his love of drinking, his love of hunting came back. Because he could do no more great deeds — or rather had not the spirit left in him to do more — he must needs, like a worn-out old man, babble of the great deeds which he had done, insult and defy his Norman neighbours; often talk what might be easily caricatured into treason against King William himself.

There were great excuses for his follies, as there are for those of every beaten man: but Hereward was spent. He had lived his life, and had no more life which he could live; for every man, it would seem, brings into the world with him a certain capacity, a certain amount of vital force, in body and in soul; and when that is used up, the man must sink down into some sort of second childhood: and end, like Hereward, very much where he began: unless the grace of God shall lift him up above the capacity of the mere flesh, into a life literally new, ever-renewing, ever-expanding, and eternal.

But the grace of God had gone away from Hereward, as it goes away from all men who are unfaithful to their wives.

It was very pitiable. Let no man judge him. Life, to most, is very hard work. There are those who endure to the end, and are saved; there are those, again, who do not endure: upon whose souls may God have mercy.



So Hereward soon became as intolerable to his Norman neighbors, as they were intolerable to him; and he had, for his own safety, to keep up at Bourne the same watch and ward, by day and night, as he had kept up in the forest.

In those days a messenger came riding post to Bourne. The Countess Judith wished to visit the tomb of her late husband, Earl Waltheof; and asked hospitality on her road of Hereward and Alftruda.

Of course she would come with a great train, and the trouble and expense would be great. But the hospitality of those days, when money was scarce, and wine scarcer still, was unbounded, and a matter of course; and Alftruda was overjoyed. No doubt, Judith was the most unpopular person in England at that moment; called by all a traitress and a fiend. But she was an old acquaintance of Alftruda's; she was the king's niece; she was immensely rich, not only in manors of her own, but in manors, as Domesday Book testifies, about Lincolnshire and the counties round, which had belonged to her murdered husband — which she had too probably received as the price of her treason. So Alftruda looked to her visit as to an honor which would enable her to hold her head high among the proud French dames, who despised her as the wife of an Englishman.

Hereward looked on the visit in a different light. He called Judith ugly names, not undeserved; and vowed that if she entered his house by the front door he would go out at the back. "Torfrida prophesied," he said, "that she would betray her husband, and she has done it."

"Torfrida prophesied? Did she prophesy that

I should betray you likewise?" asked Alftruda, in a tone of bitter scorn.

"No, you handsome fiend: will you do it?"

"Yes; I am a handsome fiend, am I not?" and she bridled up her magnificent beauty, and stood over him as a snake stands over a mouse.

"Yes; you are handsome — beautiful: I adore you."

"And yet you will not do what I wish?"

"What you wish? What would I not do for you? what have I not done for you?"

"Then receive Judith. And now, go hunting, and bring me in game. I want deer, roe, fowls; anything and everything, from the greatest to the smallest. Go and hunt."

And Hereward trembled and went.

There are flowers whose scent is so luscious that silly children will plunge their heads among them, drinking in their odor, to the exclusion of all fresh air. On a sudden, sometimes, comes a revulsion of the nerves. The delicious odor changes in a moment to a disgusting one; and the child cannot bear for years after the scent which has once become intolerable by over-sweetness. And so had it happened to Hereward. He did not love Alftruda now; he loathed, hated, dreaded her. And yet he could not take his eyes for a moment off her beauty. He watched every movement of her hand, to press it, obey it. He would have preferred instead of hunting simply to sit and watch her go about the house at her work. He was spellbound to a thing which he regarded with horror.

But he was told to go and hunt; and he went, with all his men, and sent home large supplies for



the larder. And as he hunted, the free fresh air of the forest comforted him, the free forest life came back to him, and he longed to be an outlaw once more, and hunt on forever. He would not go back yet, at least to face that Judith. So he sent back the greater part of his men with a story. He was ill: he was laid up at a farmhouse far away in the forest, and begged the countess to excuse his absence. He had sent fresh supplies of game, and a goodly company of his men, knights and housecarles, who would escort her royally to Crowland.

Judith cared little for his absence; he was but an English barbarian. Alftruda was half glad to have him out of the way, lest his now sullen and uncertain temper should break out; and bowed herself to the earth before Judith, who patronized her to her heart's content, and offered her slily insolent condolences on being married to a barbarian. She herself could sympathize — who more?

Alftruda might have answered with scorn that she was a princess, and of better English blood than Judith's French blood; but she had her ends to gain, and gained them.

For Judith was pleased to be so delighted with her that she kissed her lovingly, and said with much emotion that she required a friend who would support her through her coming trial; and who better than one who herself had suffered so much? Would she accompany her to Crowland?

Alftruda was overjoyed, and away they went.

And to Crowland they came; and to the tomb in the minster, whereof men were saying already that the sacred corpse within worked miracles of healing.

And Judith, habited in widow's weeds, approached the tomb, and laid on it, as a peace-offering to the soul of the dead, a splendid pall of silk and gold.

A fierce blast came howling off the fen, screeched through the minster towers, swept along the dark aisles; and then, so say the chroniclers, caught up the pall from off the tomb, and hurled it far away into a corner.

"A miracle!" cried all the monks at once; and honestly enough, like true Englishmen as they were.

"The Holy Saint refuses the gift, countess," said old Ulfketyl, in a voice of awe.

Judith covered her face with her hands, turned away trembling, and walked out; while all looked upon her as a thing accursed.

Of her subsequent life, her folly, her wantonness, her disgrace, her poverty, her wanderings, her wretched death, let others tell.

But these Normans believed that the curse of heaven was upon her from that day. And the best of them believed likewise that Waltheof's murder was the reason that William, her uncle, prospered no more in life.

"Ah, saucy sir," said Alftruda to Ulfketyl, as she went out. "There is one waiting at Peterborough now who will teach thee manners; Ingulf of Fontenelle, abbot in thy room."

"Does Hereward know that?" asked Ulfketyl, looking keenly at her.

"What is that to thee?" said she, fiercely; and flung out of the minster. But Hereward did not know. There were many things abroad, of which she told him nothing.

They went back, and were landed at Deeping



town, and making their way along the King Street to Bourne. Thereon a man met them running. They had best stay where they were. The Frenchmen were out, and there was fighting up in Bourne.

Alftruda's knights wanted to push on, to see after the Bourne folk; Judith's knights wanted to push on to help the French: and the two parties were ready to fight each other. There was a great tumult. The ladies had much ado to still it.

Alftruda said that it might be but a countryman's rumor; that, at least, it was shame to quarrel with their guests. At last it was agreed that two knights should gallop on into Bourne, and bring back news.

But those knights never came back. So the whole body moved on Bourne, and there they found out the news for themselves.

Hereward had gone home as soon as they had departed, and sat down to eat and drink. His manner was sad and strange. He drank much at the mid-day meal, and then lay down to sleep, setting guards as usual.

After a while he leapt up with a shriek and shudder.

They ran to him, asking whether he was ill.

"Ill? No. Yes. Ill at heart. I have had a dream — an ugly dream. I thought that all the men I ever slew on earth came to me with their wounds all gaping, and cried at me, 'Our luck then, thy luck now.' Chaplain! Is there not a verse somewhere — uncle Brand said it to me on his deathbed — 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed'?"

"Surely the master is fey," whispered Gwenoch, in fear, to the chaplain. "Answer him out of Scripture."

"Text? None such that I know of," quoth priest Ailward, a graceless fellow, who had taken Leofric's place. "If that were the law, it would be but few honest men that would die in their beds. Let us drink, and drive girls' fancies out of our heads."

So they drank again; and Hereward fell asleep once more.

"It is thy turn to watch, priest," said Winter to Ailward. "So keep the door well, for I am worn out with hunting," and so fell asleep.

Ailward shuffled into his harness, and went to the door. The wine was heady; the sun was hot. In a few minutes he was asleep likewise.

Hereward slept, who can tell how long? But at last there was a bustle, a heavy fall; and waking with a start, he sprang up. He saw Ailward lying dead across the door, and above him a crowd of fierce faces, some of which he knew too well. He saw Ivo Taillebois; he saw Oger; he saw his fellow-Breton, Sir Raoul de Dol; he saw Sir Ascelin; he saw Sir Aswart, Thorold's man; he saw Sir Hugh of Evermue, his own son-in-law; and with them he saw, or seemed to see, the Ogre of Cornwall, and Feargus of Ivark, and Dirk Hammerhand of Walcheren, and many another old foe long underground; and in his ear rang the text — "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." And Hereward knew that his end was come.

There was no time to put on mail or helmet. He saw sword and shield hang on a perch, and tore



them down. As he girded the sword on, Winter sprang to his side.

"I have three lances — two for me and one for you, and we can hold the door against twenty."

"Till they fire the house over our heads. Shall Hereward die like a wolf in a cave? Forward, all the Wake men! A Wake! A Wake!"

And he rushed out upon his fate. No man followed him, save Winter. The rest, dispersed, unarmed, were running hither and thither helplessly.

"Brothers in arms, and brothers in Valhalla!" shouted Winter as he rushed after him.

A knight was running to and fro in the court, shouting Hereward's name. "Where is the villain? Wake! We have caught thee asleep at last."

"I am out," quoth Hereward, as the man almost stumbled against him; "and this is in."

And through shield, and hauberk, and body, as says Gaimar, went Hereward's javelin, while all drew back, confounded for the moment at that mighty stroke.

"Felons!" shouted Hereward, "your king has given me his truce; and do you dare break my house, and kill my folk? Is that your French law? And is this your French honor? — To take a man unawares over his meat? Come on, traitors all, and get what you can of a naked man;[1] you will buy it dear. — Guard my back, Winter!"

And he ran right at the press of knights; and the fight began.

> "He gored them like a wood wild boar,
> As long as that lance might endure,"

says Gaimar.

> "And when that lance did break in hand,
> Full fell enough he smote with brand."

[1] *I.e.* without armor.

And as he hewed on silently, with grinding teeth, and hard, glittering eyes, of whom did he think? Of Alftruda?

Not so. But of that pale ghost, with great black hollow eyes, who sat in Crowland, with thin bare feet, and sackcloth on her tender limbs, watching, praying, longing, loving, uncomplaining. That ghost had been for many a month the background of all his thoughts and dreams. It was so clear before his mind's eye now, that unawares to himself, he shouted "Torfrida!" as he struck, and struck the harder at the sound of his old battle-cry.

And now he is all wounded and be-bled; and Winter, who has fought back to back with him, has fallen on his face; and Hereward stands alone, turning from side to side, as he sweeps his sword right and left till the forest rings with the blows, but staggering as he turns. Within a ring of eleven corpses he stands. Who will go in and make the twelfth?

A knight rushes in, to fall headlong down, cloven through the helm: but Hereward's blade snaps short, and he hurls it away as his foes rush in with a shout of joy. He tears his shield from his left arm, and with it, says Gaimar, brains two more.

But the end is come. Taillebois and Evermue are behind him now; four lances are through his back, and bear him down upon his knees.

"Cut off his head, Breton!" shouted Ivo. Raoul de Dol rushed forward, sword in hand. At that cry Hereward lifted up his dying head. One stroke more ere it was all done forever.

And with a shout of "Torfrida!" which made the Bruneswold ring, he hurled the shield full in the Breton's face, and fell forward dead.



The knights drew their lances from that terrible corpse slowly and with caution, as men who have felled a bear, and yet dare not step within reach of the seemingly lifeless paw.

"The dog died hard," said Ivo. "Lucky for us that Sir Ascelin had news of his knights being gone to Crowland. If he had had them to back him, we had not done this deed to-day."

"I must keep my word with him," said Ascelin, as he struck off the once fair and golden head.

"Ho, Breton," cried Ivo, "the villain is dead. Get up, man, and see for yourself. What ails him?"

But when they lifted up Raoul de Dol his brains were running down his face; and all men stood astonished at that last mighty stroke.

"That blow," said Ascelin, "will be sung hereafter by minstrel and maiden as the last blow of the last Englishman. Knights, we have slain a better knight than ourselves. If there had been three more such men in this realm, they would have driven us and King William back again into the sea."

So said Ascelin; those words of his, too, were sung by many a jongleur, Norman as well as English, in the times that were to come.

"Likely enough," said Ivo; "but that is the more reason why we should set that head of his up over the hall-door, as a warning to these English churls that their last man is dead, and their last stake thrown and lost."

So perished "The last of the English."

It was the third day. The French were drinking in the hall of Bourne, advising Ascelin, with coarse jests, to lose no time in espousing the fair Alftruda, who sat weeping within over the headless corpse; when in the afternoon a servant came in, and told

them how a barge full of monks had come to the shore, and that they seemed to be monks from Crowland. Ivo Taillebois bade drive them back again into the barge with whips. But Hugh of Evermue spoke up.

"I am lord and master in Bourne this day; and if Ivo have a quarrel against St. Guthlac, I have none. This Ingulf of Fontenelle, the new abbot who has come thither since old Ulfketyl was sent to prison, is a loyal man, and a friend of King William's; and my friend he shall be till he behaves himself as my foe. Let them come up in peace."

Taillebois growled and cursed: but the monks came up, and into the hall; and at their head Ingulf himself, to receive whom all men rose, save Taillebois.

"I come," said Ingulf, in most courtly French, "noble knights, to ask a boon in the name of the Most Merciful, on behalf of a noble and unhappy lady. Let it be enough to have avenged yourself on the living. Gentlemen and Christians war not against the dead."

"No, no, master abbot!" shouted Taillebois; "Waltheof is enough to keep Crowland in miracles for the present. You shall not make a martyr of another Saxon churl. He wants the barbarian's body, knights, and you will be fools if you let him have it."

"Churl? Barbarian?" said a haughty voice; and a nun stepped forward who had stood just behind Ingulf. She was clothed entirely in black. Her bare feet were bleeding from the stones: her hand, as she lifted it, was as thin as a skeleton's.

She threw back her veil, and showed to the



knights what had been once the famous beauty of Torfrida.

But the beauty was long passed away. Her hair was white as snow; her cheeks were fallen in. Her hawk-like features were all sharp and hard. Only in their hollow sockets burned still the great black eyes, so fiercely that all men turned uneasily from her gaze.

"Churl? Barbarian?" she said slowly and quietly, but with an intensity which was more terrible than rage. "Who gives such names to one who was as much better born and better bred than they who now sit here, as he was braver and more terrible than they? The base woodcutter's son? — The upstart who would have been honored had he taken service as yon dead man's groom? ——"

"Talk to me so, and my stirrup leathers shall make acquaintance with your sides," said Taillebois.

"Keep them for your wife. Churl? Barbarian? There is not a man within this hall who is not a barbarian compared with him. Which of you touched the harp like him? Which of you, like him, could move all hearts with song? Which of you knows all tongues from Lapland to Provence? Which of you has been the joy of ladies' bowers, the counsellor of earls and heroes, the rival of a mighty king? Which of you will compare yourself with him — whom you dared not even strike, you and your robber crew, fairly in front, but skulked round him till he fell pecked to death by you, as Lapland Skratlings peck to death the bear? Ten years ago he swept this hall of such as you, and hung their heads upon yon gable outside; and were he alive but one five minutes, this hall would be right cleanly swept again! Give me his

body — or bear forever the name of cowards, and Torfrida's curse."

She fixed her terrible eyes first on one, and then on another, calling them by name.

"Ivo Taillebois — basest of all ——"

"Take the witch's accursed eyes off me!" and he covered his face with his hands. "I shall be overlooked — planet-struck. Hew the witch down! Take her away!"

"Hugh of Evermue — The dead man's daughter is yours, and the dead man's lands. Are not these remembrances enough of him? Are you so fond of his memory that you need his corpse likewise?"

"Give it her! Give it her!" said he, hanging down his head like a rated cur.

"Ascelin of Lincoln, once Ascelin of Ghent — There was a time when you would have done — what would you not? — for one glance of Torfrida's eyes. Stay. Do not deceive yourself, fair sir. Torfrida means to ask no favor of you, or of living man. But she commands you. Do the thing she bids, or with one glance of her eye she sends you childless to your grave."

"Madam! Lady Torfrida! What is there I would not do for you? What have I done now, save avenge your great wrong?"

Torfrida made no answer: but fixed steadily on him eyes which widened every moment.

"But, madam" — and he turned shrinking from the fancied spell — "what would you have? The — the corpse? It is in the keeping of — of another lady."

"So?" said Torfrida, quietly. "Leave her to me;" and she swept past them all, and flung open



the bower door at their backs, discovering Alftruda sitting by the dead.

The ruffians were so utterly appalled, not only by the false powers of magic, but by the veritable powers of majesty and eloquence, that they let her do what she would.

"Out!" cried she, using a short and terrible epithet. "Out, siren, with fairy's face and tail of fiend, and leave the husband with his wife!"

Alftruda looked up, shrieked; and then, with the sudden passion of a weak nature, drew a little knife, and sprang up.

Ivo made a coarse jest. The abbot sprang in: "For the sake of all holy things, let there be no more murder here!"

Torfrida smiled, and fixed her snake's eye upon her wretched rival.

"Out! woman, and choose thee a new husband among these French gallants, ere I blast thee from head to foot with the leprosy of Naaman the Syrian."

Alftruda shuddered, and fled shrieking into an inner room.

"Now, knights, give me — that which hangs outside."

Ascelin hurried out, glad to escape. In a minute he returned.

The head was already taken down. A tall lay brother, the moment he had seen it, had climbed the gable, snatched it away, and now sat in a corner of the yard, holding it on his knees, talking to it, chiding it, as if it had been alive. When men had offered to take it, he had drawn a battle-axe from under his frock, and threatened to brain all comers. And the monks had warned off Ascelin,

saying that the man was mad, and had Berserk fits of superhuman strength and rage.

"He will give it me," said Torfrida, and went out.

"Look at that gable, foolish head," said the madman. "Ten years agone, you and I took down from thence another head. Oh, foolish head, to get yourself at last into that same place! Why would you not be ruled by her, you foolish golden head?"

"Martin!" said Torfrida.

"Take it and comb it, mistress, as you used to do. Comb out the golden locks again, fit to shine across the battlefield. She has let them all get tangled into elf-knots, that lazy slut within."

Torfrida took it from his hands, dry-eyed, and went in.

Then the monks silently took up the bier, and all went forth, and down the Roman road toward the fen. They laid the corpse within the barge, and slowly rowed away.

> "And past the Deeping, down the Welland stream,
> By winding reaches on, and shining meres
> Between gray reed-ronds and green alder-beds,
> And the brown horror of the homeless fen,
> A dirge of monks and wail of women rose
> In vain to heaven for the last Englishman;
> Then died far off within the boundless mist,
> And left the Frenchman master of the land."

So Torfrida took the corpse home to Crowland, and buried it in the choir, near the blessed martyr St. Waltheof; after which she did not die, but lived on many years,[1] spending all day in nursing and feeding the Countess Godiva, and lying all night on Hereward's tomb, and praying that he might find grace and mercy in that day.

[1] If Ingulf can be trusted, Torfrida died about A. D. 1085.



Down the Roman road toward the fen.





And at last Godiva died; and they took her away, and buried her with great pomp in her own minster-church of Coventry.

And after that Torfrida died likewise; because she had nothing else for which to live. And they laid her in Hereward's grave, and their dust is mingled to this day.

And Oger the Breton got back Morcar's lands, and held them at least till the time of Domesday Book. But Manthorpe, Toft, and Witham, Aswart, Thorold's man, got back; and they were held for several centuries by the abbey of Peterborough, seemingly as some set off for Abbot Thorold's thirty thousand marks.

And Ivo Taillebois did evil mightily all his days; and how he died, and what befell him after death, let Peter of Blois declare.

And Leofric the priest lived on to a good old age, and above all things he remembered the deeds and the sins of his master; and wrote them in a book, and this is what remains thereof.

But when Martin Lightfoot died no man has said; for no man in those days took account of such poor churls and running serving-men.

And Hereward's comrades were all scattered abroad, some maimed, some blinded, some with tongues cut out, to beg by the wayside, or crawl into convents, and then die; while their sisters and daughters, ladies born and bred, were the slaves of grooms and scullions from beyond the sea.

And so, as sang Thorkel Skallason —

"Cold heart and bloody hand[1]
Now rule English land."

[1] Laing's Heimskringla.

And after that things waxed even worse and worse, for sixty years and more; all through the reigns of the two Williams, and of Henry Beauclerc, and of Stephen; till men saw visions and portents, and thought that the foul fiend was broken loose on earth. And they whispered oftener and oftener that the soul of Hereward haunted the Bruneswold, where he loved to hunt the dun deer and the roe. And in the Bruneswold, when Henry of Poitou was made abbot,[1] men saw — "let no man think lightly of the marvel which we are about to relate as a truth, for it was well known all over the country — upon the Sunday, when men sing 'Exsurge quare, O Domine,' many hunters hunting, black, and tall, and loathly, and their hounds were black and ugly with wide eyes, and they rode on black horses and black bucks. And they saw them in the very deer-park in the town of Peterborough, and in all the woods to Stamford; and the monks heard the blasts of the horns which they blew in the night. Men of truth kept watch upon them, and said that there might be well about twenty or thirty horn-blowers. This was seen and heard all that Lent until Easter." And the French monks of Peterborough said how it was the Wake, doomed to wake forever with Apollyon and all his crew, because he had stolen the riches of the Golden Borough: but the poor folk knew better, and said, That the mighty outlaw was rejoicing in the chase, blowing his horn for Englishmen to rise against the French; and therefore it was that he was seen first on "Arise O Lord" Sunday.

But they were so sore trodden down that they

[1] Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, A. D. 1127.



could never rise; for "the French[1] had filled the land full of castles. They greatly oppressed the wretched people by making them work at these castles; and when the castles were finished, they filled them with devils and evil men. They took those whom they suspected of having any goods, both men and women, and they put them in prison for their gold and silver, and tortured them with pains unspeakable, for never were any martyrs tormented as these were. They hung some by their feet, and smoked them with foul smoke; some by the thumbs or by the head, and put burning things on their feet. They put a knotted string round their heads, and twisted it till it went into the brain. They put them in dungeons wherein were adders, and snakes, and toads, and thus wore them out. Some they put into a crucet-house — that is, into a chest that was short and narrow, and they put sharp stones therein, and crushed the man so that they broke all his bones. There were hateful and grim things called sachenteges in many of the castles, which two or three men had enough to do to carry. This sachentege was made thus: It was fastened to a beam, having a sharp iron to go round a man's throat and neck, so that he might no ways sit, nor lie, nor sleep, but he must bear all the iron. Many thousands they wore out with hunger. . . . They were continually levying a tax from the towns, which they called Truserie, and when the wretched townsfolk had no more to give, then burnt they all the towns, so that well mightest thou walk a whole day's journey or ever thou shouldest see a man settled in a town, or its lands tilled. . . .

[1] Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, A. D. 1137.

"Then was corn dear, and flesh, and cheese, and butter, for there was none in the land. Wretched men starved with hunger. Some lived on alms who had been once rich. Some fled the country. Never was there more misery, and never heathens acted worse than these."

For now the sons of the Church's darlings, of the crusaders whom the Pope had sent, beneath a gonfanon blessed by him, to destroy the liberties of England, turned by a just retribution upon that very French clergy who had abetted all their iniquities in the name of Rome. "They spared neither church nor churchyard, but took all that was valuable therein, and then burned the church and all together. Neither did they spare the lands of bishops, nor of abbots, nor of priests: but they robbed the monks and clergy, and every man plundered his neighbor as much as he could. If two or three men came riding to a town, all the townsfolk fled before them, and thought that they were robbers. The bishops and clergy were forever cursing them: but this to them was nothing, for they were all accursed and forsworn and reprobate. The earth bare no corn: you might as well have tilled the sea; for all the land was ruined by such deeds, and it was said openly that Christ and His saints slept."

And so was avenged the blood of Harold and his brothers, of Edwin and Morcar, of Waltheof and Hereward.

And those who had the spirit of Hereward in them fled to the merry greenwood, and became bold outlaws, with Robin Hood, Scarlet, and John, Adam Bell, and Clym of the Cleugh, and William of Cloudeslee; and watched with sullen joy the



French robbers tearing in pieces each other, and the Church who had blest their crime.

And they talked and sung of the Wake, and all his doughty deeds, over the hearth in lone farm-houses, or in the outlaw's lodge beneath the hollins green; and all the burden of their song was, "Ah that the Wake were alive again!" for they knew not that the Wake was alive for evermore: that only his husk and shell lay mouldering there in Crowland choir; that above them, and around them, and in them, destined to raise them out of that bitter bondage, and mould them into a great nation, and the parents of still greater nations in lands as yet unknown, brooded the immortal spirit of the Wake, now purged from all earthly dross — even the spirit of Freedom, which can never die.

CHAPTER XLII

HOW DEEPING FEN WAS DRAINED

BUT war and disorder, ruin and death, cannot last forever. They are by their own nature exceptional and suicidal, and spend themselves with what they feed on. And then the true laws of God's universe, peace and order, usefulness and life, will reassert themselves, as they have been waiting all along to do, hid in God's presence from the strife of men.

And even so it was with Bourne.

Nearly eighty years after, in the year of grace 1155, there might have been seen sitting, side by side, and hand in hand, upon a sunny bench on the Bruneswold slope, in the low December sun, an old knight and an old lady, the master and mistress of Bourne.

Much had changed since Hereward's days. The house below had been raised a whole story. There were fresh herbs and flowers in the garden, unknown at the time of the Conquest. But the great change was in the fen, especially away toward Deeping, on the southeastern horizon.

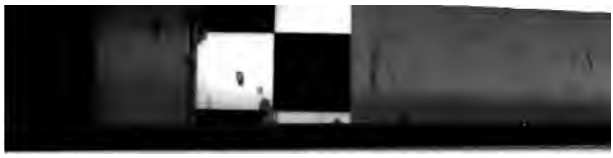
Where had been lonely meres, foul watercourses, stagnant slime, there were now great dykes, rich and fair corn and grass lands, rows of white cottages. The newly drained land swarmed with stocks of new breeds: horses and sheep from Flanders, cattle



Then perished all the riches of Crowland; its library too, of more than seven hundred volumes, with that famous nadir, or orrery, the like whereof was not in all England, wherein the seven planets were represented, each in their proper metals. And even worse, all the charters of the monastery perished, a loss which involved the monks thereof in centuries of lawsuits, and compelled them to become as industrious and skilful forgers of documents as were to be found in the minsters of the Middle Age.

But Crowland minster had been rebuilt in greater glory than ever, by the help of the French gentry round. Abbot Ingulf, finding that St. Guthlac's plain inability to take care of himself had discredited him much in the fen-men's eyes, fell back, Frenchman as he was, on the virtues of the holy martyr, St. Waltheof, whose tomb he opened with due reverence, and found the body as whole and uncorrupted as on the day on which it was buried; and the head united to the body, while a fine crimson line around the neck was the only sign remaining of his decollation.

On seeing which Ingulf "could not contain himself for joy; and interrupting the response which the brethren were singing, with a loud voice began the hymn 'Te Deum Laudamus,' on which the chanter, taking it up, enjoined the rest of the brethren to sing it." After which Ingulf — who had never seen Waltheof in life — discovered that it was none other than he whom he had seen in a vision at Fontenelle, as an earl most gorgeously arrayed, with a torc of gold about his neck, and with him an abbot, two bishops, and two saints, the three former being Usfran, Ausbert, and Wan-



dresigil of Fontenelle; and the two saints, of course, St. Guthlac and St. Neot.

Whereon, crawling on his hands and knees, he kissed the face of the holy martyr, and "perceived such a sweet odor proceeding from the holy body, as he never remembered to have smelt, either in the palace of the king, or in Syria with all its aromatic herbs."

Quid plura? What more was needed for a convent of burnt-out monks? St. Waltheof was translated in state to the side of St. Guthlac; and the news of this translation of the holy martyr being spread throughout the country, multitudes of the faithful flocked daily to the tomb, and offering up their vows there, tended in a great degree to "resuscitate our monastery."

But more. The virtues of St. Waltheof were too great not to turn themselves, or be turned, to some practical use. So if not in the days of Ingulf, at least in those of Abbot Joffrid, who came after him, St. Waltheof began again, says Peter of Blois, to work wonderful deeds. "The blind received their sight, the deaf their hearing, the lame their power of walking, and the dumb their power of speech; while each day troops innumerable of other sick persons were arriving by every road, as to the very fountain of their safety . . . and by the offerings of the pilgrims who came flocking in from every part, the revenues of the monastery were increased in no small degree."

Only one wicked Norman monk of St. Albans, Audwin by name, dared to dispute the sanctity of the martyr, calling him a wicked traitor who had met with his deserts. In vain did Abbot Joffrid, himself a Norman from St. Evroult, expostulate

with the inconvenient blasphemer. He launched out into invective beyond measure; till on the spot, in presence of the said father, he was seized with such a stomach-ache, that he went home to St. Albans, and died in a few days; after which all went well with Crowland, and the French monks, who worked the English martyr to get money out of the English whom they had enslaved.

And yet — so strangely mingled for good and evil are the works of men — that lying brotherhood of Crowland set up, in those very days, for pure love of learning and of teaching learning, a little school of letters in a poor town hard by; which became, under their auspices, the University of Cambridge.

So the bells of Crowland were restored, more melodious than ever; and Richard of Rulos doubtless had his share in their restoration. And that day they were ringing with a will and for a good reason; for that day had come the news, that Henry Plantagenet was crowned king of England.

"'Lord,'" said the good old knight, "'now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.' This day, at last, he sees an English king head the English people."

"God grant," said the old lady, "that he may be such a lord to England as thou hast been to Bourne."

"If he will be — and better far will he be, by God's grace, from what I hear of him, than ever I have been — he must learn that which I learnt from thee: to understand these English men, and know what stout and trusty prudhommes they are all, down to the meanest serf, when once one can humor their sturdy independent tempers."

"And he must learn, too, the lesson which thou didst teach me, when I would have had thee, in the pride of youth, put on the magic armor of my



ancestors and win me fame in every tournament and battlefield. Blessed be the day when Richard of Rulos said to me, 'If others dare to be men of war, I dare more; for I dare to be a man of peace. Have patience with me, and I will win for thee and for myself a renown more lasting, before God and man, than ever was won with lance!' Do you remember those words, Richard mine?"

The old man leant his head upon his hands. "It may be that not those words, but the deeds which God has caused to follow them, may, by Christ's merits, bring us a short purgatory and a long heaven."

"Amen. Only whatever grief we may endure in the next life for our sins, may we endure it as we have the griefs of this life, hand in hand."

"Amen, Torfrida. There is one thing more to do before we die. The tomb in Crowland; — Ever since the fire blackened it, it has seemed to me too poor and mean to cover the dust which once held two such noble souls. Let us send over to Normandy for fair white stone of Caen, and let us carve a tomb worthy of thy grandparents."

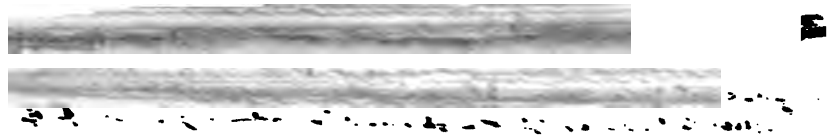
"And what shall we write thereon?"

"What but that which is there already? 'Here lies the last of the English.'"

"Not so. We will write — 'Here lies the last of the old English.' But upon thy tomb, when thy time comes, the monks of Crowland shall write —

"'Here lies the first of the new English; who, by the inspiration of God, began to drain the Fens.'"

EXPLICIT







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